

Facebook and Panopticism: Healthy Curiosity or Stalking?

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ABSTRACT

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This study deepens existing knowledge concerning social networking sites, with specific interest in the social networking site Facebook and the phenomenon, “Facebook stalking”. By providing insights into lesser-known studies concerning user curiosity and surveillance online, the present research reveals that the terms ‘monitoring’ and ‘keeping up with’ or ‘keeping in touch with’ are most commonly used when referring to social searches within social networks; only when asked to think about surveillance in terms of stalking did interview participants refer to it as such.

The present study aims to discover Facebook users’ perception of their friends’ disclosure while delving into the idea of “Facebook stalking”, specifically with regard to how users define it. Facebook’s evolution and prominence in the public sphere is dependent upon user satisfaction with and general understanding of the functionality of social networking websites. A discussion of these issues is beneficial to understanding how Facebook is used as a modern-day panopticon.

Approved: _____

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CHAPTER 1: FACEBOOK AND PANOPTICISM

Introduction

The Internet is arguably a “must have” commodity in contemporary society: Everything, from shopping to making friends, has moved from a world of personal contact to a virtual age where little to no face-to-face interaction is necessary to achieve one’s goals. Over the past decade, the Internet’s popularity has grown so much that most affluent college freshmen today have never experienced life without access to the World Wide Web. Due to the boom in Internet usage for communicating with friends, co-workers, and acquaintances, social networking sites such as Facebook have become incredibly popular among people across generational lines. This medium’s ability to connect people despite spatial barriers is fascinating because of the effects it has on its users.

The primary purpose of this research is to understand the general use of and disclosure practices on the social networking site Facebook by a subset of college-aged users. Additionally, it aims to discover Facebook users’ perception of their friends’ disclosure while delving into the idea of “Facebook stalking,” specifically with regard to how users define it. Popular conceptualizations of “Facebook stalking” can be found at urbandictionary.com. One user describes “Facebook stalking” as “a covert method of investigation using facebook.com. [It’s] good for discovering a wealth of information about people you don’t actually know” (Urban Dictionary, 2009, np). Another definition explains:

Facebook stalking, like regular stalking, allows the stalker to secretly gather

information about the person they are interested in... Facebook stalking is less likely to have an illegal component and is generally accepted by its voyeuristic victims. The argument being, that if you didn't want others to know about your life, you wouldn't post it all over the Internet. (np)

Facebook's evolution and prominence in the public sphere will be discussed based on an extensive literature review and on the opinions of college-aged users recruited on the website itself via online interviews.

The Internet's ability to connect people despite spatial barriers is fascinating because of the effects it has on its users. Many researchers regard Facebook as a breeding ground for academic study (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006; Joinson, 2008; Kolek & Saunders, 2008). Students in college today "have always used the Internet more than members of the general American population, and recent studies of students' Internet use have found that students report spending greater amounts of time online than they have in the past" (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 3). This begs the question: What are younger generations doing online today, and why are they spending so much time there? Use of the Internet for daily communication has an effect on the socialization skills for many people. With the advent of social networking sites and matchmaking websites, "some researchers have recently postulated that computer-mediated communication and online social networks foster connections between participants, supporting a wide array of relationships" (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 167). Thus, communication through social networking sites should be studied because it affects people in different ways.

By taking a qualitative approach to studying Facebook, this research will deepen the existing knowledge concerning social networking sites and will provide insights into

lesser-known studies concerning phenomena such as user curiosity and surveillance on the social networking site. Since much of existing research focuses on Facebook as a site only available to those with '.edu addresses', the present research's results are applicable to a broader context since Facebook is now open to anyone.

An analysis of Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's panopticon explains that "the watcher cannot be seen or identified by the watched, the [watched] develop an impersonal and anonymous relationship with power. Without being able to verify the presence of the watcher, they soon behave as if they are being watched, without knowing for certain whether or not this is the case. Thus, discipline becomes self-regulatory" (Downing, 2008, p. 82). Watching without being seen is actually a common practice within our social lives; and the same can be said for our social lives online: People can view the profiles of their acquaintances without their knowledge every day, and multiple times a day. This encompasses what Downing suggests in her analysis of Foucault that "the effects of disciplinary power are not exercised from a single vantage point, but are mobile, multivalent and internal to the very fabric of our everyday life" (p. 83). Using this theoretical framework as a model for a strict reading of the Facebook community, multiple users come together as an equal yet diverse group to form a virtual community where the act of viewing one another's profiles centrally is not seen as uncommon or as stalking; rather, it is a norm of the community. Therefore, the completion of this study will help to explain current user behaviors (with respect to curiosity and stalking) on the site and to consider the implications of the findings for society as a whole.

Research Questions

By focusing on the regulation of social behavior based on the theoretical underpinnings of Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault, in addition to adhering to the tight definitions of cyberstalking and panopticism mentioned previously, the present research will be guided by the three central areas of interest, including discovering how users might respond to browsing Facebook as an opportunity to practice various degrees of social surveillance; how users describe their behavior with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism, especially regarding personal identities on public profiles; and ultimately how social-searching might lead to cyberstalking and whether Facebook users consider their behavior to be reminiscent of that of a cyberstalker. Each of these interest areas, taken together, speak to a larger notion of power, which will be discussed later.

Literature Review

The Rise of Social Networking Sites

At the height of the digital age in which we live are social networking websites. According to Hart and colleagues (2008), “with the advent of Web 2.0, social networking websites have been one of the main internet success stories in recent years, Facebook receiving most of the attention as it continues to become a growing success” (p. 471). Additionally, because “new media [have] now adapted the use of social web services as a vital means of interacting, communicating and sharing,” (p. 471) major improvements in connectivity and sociability have occurred in a short amount of time, prompting various research projects on the implications it has on society. According to Hart et al, “most academic research on Facebook has focused on the concerns of identity and privacy.

Although users are free to share as much (or as little) data as they feel comfortable with, Facebook users express notions of trust and willingness to share personal data on the website, despite personal profiles being searchable by anyone on the network” (p. 471). This alone merits cause for study: With the recent and massive popularity of social networking sites, especially among young people, lines of privacy and decency are blurred, generating concern about social practices in the digital age. Furthermore, the formation of online identities and the notions of privacy that go along with having public profiles are at the root of much of the academic interest in social networking websites.

The amount of information that users are willing to disclose on social networking sites especially applies to young users. However, as much research has noted, Facebook is different from other social networking sites. According to Hart et al (2008), with respect to Facebook:

Members seem to be using it as a tool for maintaining previous relationships, and as a ‘social search’ tool by which they can investigate people they have meet [sic] offline. Members use the site mainly to manage relationships initiated offline by maintaining contact with old friends and getting to know new ones. Other SNS carry out ‘social browsing’ or search for new online friends with the intention of moving that relationship offline. (p. 471)

The latest comprehensive research completed by Pew Internet (2007) concerning teenagers and privacy in online social networks supports this notion, reporting that nearly 90% of teens on social networking sites use it to maintain relationships with their current friends or people that they rarely see (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. ii).

Essentially, the aim of the Hart's and colleagues' (2008) study shows a keen interest in how and what users are doing on social networking sites. The researchers found that "users frequently visited several times a day, browsing Facebook, when doing something else (usually an online activity) and then periodically revisiting Facebook" (p. 472). Taking this idea a step further, Zywica and Danowski (2008) report that their findings on user behavior and profile characteristics on Facebook. In their in-depth study of Facebook, Zywica and Danowski explain that "...self-enhancement, self-protection and self-esteem are all motivating factors for using the Internet" (p. 5), and it was found that messages sent through Facebook's various applications and functions allow users to form impressions of their acquaintances without physically meeting them. Ultimately, it is evident that "research on Facebook is starting to emerge, although a focus on the motives for using Facebook is not yet well documented" (p. 7). Here, one can clearly see the rationalization for studying current trends in online practices qualitatively.

Social networking sites have steadily risen in popularity over the past few years. According to alexa.com, a website that compiles various types of web information, Facebook ranks among the top 5 websites online. Joinson (2008) explains the various uses of social networking sites, stating that they "typically provide users with a profile space, facilitates for upload content, messaging in various forms and the ability to make connections to other people" (p. 1027). The connections made on social networking sites are considered to be "the core functionality of a social network site although most also provide opportunities for the communication, the forming of groups, hosting of content and small applications" (p. 1027).

Even though this research is qualitative in nature, understanding the quantifiable means of social networking websites is essential to the comprehension and application of modern technology in communication. By taking a uses and gratifications approach to studying users' interactions with Facebook, some Internet researchers have "probe[d] in more depth the exact nature of 'keeping in touch' as both a use and a gratification" (p. 1034). Furthermore, Joinson points out that "users derive a variety of uses and gratifications from social networking sites, including traditional content gratification alongside building social capital, communication, surveillance, and social networking surfing" (Joinson, 2008, p. 1035).

History of Facebook

The social networking site Facebook got its start in a Harvard dorm room in 2004. Creator Mark Zuckerberg and some of his friends launched the site in February 2004; and by the end of that year, Facebook reached "nearly one million active users" (Company Timeline, 2009, np). Since sites like Facebook make it easier for people to connect with one another regardless of time and distance, they have become a part of the contemporary lifestyle for students and professionals alike. According to Facebook's platform, the site "is a part of millions of people's lives all around the world providing unparalleled distribution potential for applications and the opportunity to build a business that is highly relevant to people's lives" (Facebook Factsheet, 2008, para. 4). In fact, the site touts that it has over 90 million users who have accessed their personal pages within the last month (para. 9). According to some researchers, "Facebook... has become hugely popular among college students since its inception in 2004. While participation...raise[s]

some concerns about privacy, there are potential benefits from participation, such as meeting new people... or learning more about people in one's offline community" (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 167). However, others emphasize that "before opening to non-academic (and non-US-based) users, Facebook.com was peculiar amongst social networking sites since many of the social networks its users built were based on offline, geographically confined groups" (Joinson, 2008, p. 1027). This social networking site, from its inception, proves to be unique among its competitors and encourages different user behavior when compared to other social networking sites.

In fact, Kolek and Saunders (2008) suggest that "in the short amount of time during which Facebook has been available to students..., both administrators and students have grappled with a[n] avalanche of issues relevant to all Internet communications, but made immediate and pressing by the 'Facebook phenomenon'" (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 2). Calling the rapid spread and overnight popularity of the website a 'phenomenon,' Kolek and Saunders explain that "since its inception, Facebook has undergone numerous changes that directly affect users" (p. 5). In fall 2005, Facebook gave its users the ability to post pictures and to tag photos, which means that names and profiles could be linked to specific pictures. And, in September 2006, Zuckerberg and his staff introduced a 'news feed' or 'mini feed' which offers users an list of updates and changes friends have made to their profiles (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). These new features offered users a unique look into the lives of their friends and acquaintances since all information was instantaneously updated on one feed that was available upon logging in to the site. It soon became obvious that "...with such an overwhelming majority of students having a[n]... account... Facebook is a space in which students connect and

interact with each other...” (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 17). It is important to note, however, that “when compared to other social networking tools, Facebook’s primary distinction is that participation is structured by offline social networks, initially membership in a university community, although now ... high schools, towns and regions, and companies are the basis of Facebook ‘networks’” (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 167). This is another characteristic that makes the site unique when compared to similar networking sites, which may be a reason some users are more drawn to Facebook than other sites.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, new developments in social networking interfaces and other applications afford users the opportunity to share updates about what they are doing, where they are, and with whom they are (Lenhart & Fox, 2009). Surveys suggest that “as of December 2008, 11% of online American adults said they used a service...that allowed them to share updates about themselves or to see the updates of others” (p. 1). In a similar study, Lenhart (2009) reports that “the share of adult internet users who have a profile on an online social network has more than quadrupled in the past four years – from 8% in 2005 to 35% [in late 2008]” (p. 1). Research notes that as with most technologies, members of the younger generations are the earliest of adopters. According to the project’s most recent report, “75% of online adults 18-24 have a profile on a social networking site, while 57% of online adults 25-34 [do]” (p. 1). The percentage of adults with profiles decreases as age increases; however, use of social networking sites by adults has increased dramatically over the course of four years, which merits academic study. Furthermore, the project suggests that social network users tend to be students since 68% of full time students and 71% of part-time students

report having a profile on a social networking site while only 28% of adults who are not students have one (Lenhart, 2009). These findings justify interviewing students to determine their opinions concerning Facebook stalking since they represent the group with the most use of social networking sites.

Uses of Social Networking Sites

The amount of information users are willing to disclose on social networking sites raises cause for concern especially in regard to younger users. However, as much research has noted, Facebook is different from other social networking sites. Joinson (2008) notes that “social networks serve a number of functions in offline life – for instance, providing social and emotional support, information resources and ties to other people” (p. 1027). By supplying support and information that connects online users, it is easy to see why some users are drawn to social networking websites. Essentially, some researchers stress that the uses of Facebook “suggest that messaging is used to maintain and build social ties across distances” (p. 1028), which is another factor unique to social networking sites.

Lenhart (2009) also reports that the primary use of social networking sites is for personal reasons. Essentially, the project’s findings suggest that “most adults use online social networks primarily to connect with friends” (p. 6). The project’s findings also report that “enthusiastic users have used [social networks]...to help organize and disseminated information during major events...” (Lenhart & Fox, 2009, p. 2). Users also report purposes for using networking sites to include “airing complaints..., sharing ideas, forwarding interesting material, documenting events, conversing and flirting” (p. 2).

With respect to the Internet and social networking purposes, students report using the Internet “for fun” (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 3), and “as a means of communicating for social purposes” (p. 3-4). Being able to connect with like-minded people online is a selling point for many social networking sites. In fact, Lampe and his colleagues suggest that “often, the development of online interactions focuses on finding people online with whom you have a shared connection, but would not be likely to meet in an offline context” (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 167); however, they also note that “there are examples of participants who do meet people online for emotional support or understanding that they may not be able to receive in their offline interactions” (p. 167).

Uses of Facebook

While the focus of this research is more qualitative in nature, much of the research on Facebook use in particular has come from scholars who are concerned with specific uses of the social networking website. Facebook users are a unique subset of people. From its inception until September 2005, Facebook was only available to college students. Next, a high school network was added; but for a few months, the two networks were separate entities. However, in September 2006, Facebook expanded their registration to make it possible for anyone to join; and by the end of 2006, the site had nearly 12 million active users (Company Timeline, 2009, np). Currently, Facebook boasts having over 200 million users, just five years after it got its start in a Harvard dorm room. So, what makes Facebook so popular that it reached over 200 million users in just five short years? By applying some of the tenets of uses and gratifications theory, researchers

have determined what outcomes people seek and find by using social networking websites.

According to Joinson (2008), “a sub-set of users gain gratification through the use of applications within Facebook, rather than through the accrual of ‘friends...’” (p. 1034); however, he also notes that “many of the applications available in Facebook are social in nature...they may serve to strengthen social ties, rather than acting to increase the overall size of a social network” (p. 1034). Lampe and colleagues agree, explaining that “Facebook users...are primarily using Facebook to increase their awareness of those in their offline community, which is contrary to the popular view of how online social networking sites are used” (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 169). Essentially, Lampe and his colleagues introduce the idea of social searching or “the use of social networking software to increase knowledge about people in an offline social network” (p. 169). Because Facebook offers features that afford users a unique look into the lives of their friends upon logging into the site, many “users may assume that others are engaging in the same types of behaviors they report in themselves, namely searching for information about their offline connections” (p. 169). Therefore, Lampe and colleagues assert that “Facebook members seem to be using Facebook as a surveillance tool for maintaining previous relationships, and as a ‘social search’ tool by which they investigate people they’ve met offline” (p. 170).

Self-Disclosure

According to Joinson (2003), “some Internet users may experience less inhibition online and be more outgoing, social, and involved than in face-to-face situations” (as

cited in Zywica & Danowski, 2008, p. 7). Essentially, Zywica and Danowski (2008) postulate that while “many users turn to the Internet for self-enhancement, self-protection, and self-esteem purposes[,] others get online to find meaning in their lives, to affiliate with other people, and to find a sense of self-control and self-efficacy” (p. 8). In fact, as Lampe and his colleagues (2006) suggest, Zywica’s and Danowski’s research also claims that “there is usually some common offline activity among individual users who friend one another, such as a shared class or extracurricular activity” (p. 8). The noun “friend” recently has taken on qualities of a verb as motivated users of the social networking site have begun using it to describe the action of making friends and acquaintances via the site’s social searching methods. Similarly, Hart and colleagues highlight “this new form of Internet browsing, of ‘hanging around’ on websites” (p. 472) and note how it “contrasts with the previous web surfing habits” (p. 472). The idea of hanging around on websites “further raises the question about the relevance of traditional methods of usability such as task completion time when designing and evaluating social web services” (p. 472). Therefore, Hart and colleagues “developed a...self-reported experience scale consisting of the ten most prominent positive and negative aspects thought relevant for online social networking”(p. 472). The experiences on the self-report scale include fun and playfulness, enjoyment, excitement, self-expression and curiosity, frustration, embarrassment, boredom, and feeling limited and rushed. Of these experiences, the two that “were selected most often were curiosity and enjoyment” (p. 472). Curiosity is the most intriguing of these experiences because of the social aspects it ties to online practices: Users reported “keeping an eye on what friends are up to... [which] was often referred to as ‘stalking’ or ‘page-stalking’ or just being ‘nosey’” (p.

473). Additionally, Hart et al report that many of their respondents “said that it was the ability to communicate with friends that was what ‘Facebook is really good for’” (p. 473).

Since “Facebook provides a platform for self-expression or a means of identification” (Hart et al, 2008, p. 473), it is important that self-disclosure and perceptions of who can view what is actually disclosed are examined. Hart and colleagues note that “as a social networking site, Facebook assists the facilitation of social interaction offering a plethora of methods of interacting with friends, which is one of the necessities of a social network” (p. 473). Again, they highlight curiosity as a factor that

...emerged as another popular user experience and was often accompanied by fun, which can be a compelling motivator. Facebook takes advantage of curiosity by enticing users in to find out more about their friends through the numerous options on a profile page. A user is drawn in through the mini feed, groups, photos and applications. (p. 473)

Along the same lines as the curiosity factor, the researchers discovered that “the aspect of ‘stalking’ was found to be a common activity on Facebook, which was generally done in secret where users felt guilty at intruding on their friends’ privacy” (p. 473). In essence, Hart and colleagues surmised that “as a social web service [Facebook] not only provides a great deal of social pleasure but provokes curiosity, provides a base for self-expression and evokes memories of the past, along with a myriad of emotional and hedonic user experiences” (p. 474). These ideas tie in perfectly with readings of Foucault with respect to identity and individuality and of Bentham’s rendering of the panopticon. As discussed

previously, Foucault (1988) explains that “it [is] generally acknowledged that it was good to be reflective... to set aside a few moments a day...for a retreat into [one]self” (p. 27), and social networking websites typically provide an arena for one to achieve this. Additionally, he suggests that “writing [is] also important... One of the main features of taking care involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed” (p. 27). These thoughts are in perfect alignment with the general uses of social networking sites today. Writing about oneself and relaying personal details on to profiles for public and even internal scrutiny is arguably one of the main functions for social networking sites. As a haven for retreat, social networking sites such as Facebook offer users a place to review and evaluate certain aspects of daily life. This kind of introspection suggests that “a culture of silence becomes more and more important” (p. 32). This culture of silence, exacerbated by the panoptic features of social networking sites, is laden with questions of power and individuality.

With the amount of information users divulge on social networking sites growing, important issues including “privacy, online disclosures, the notion of community, and the amount of time students spend online” (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 2) arose. Authorities were concerned that students would become unknowing prey to online predators based on the amounts of self-disclosure typical Facebook profiles exhibited. Furthermore, “concerns have also been raised about the ease of stalking students because of what they disclose..., a worry amplified by several incidents of people being sexually assaulted, kidnapped, or killed by individuals who found their profiles on other social networking

sites” (p. 5-6). In May 2009, even, a Craigslist killer emerged, soliciting and answering ads from unknowing women on the website.

The idea that the Internet is indeed not a safe haven for users has not seemed to sink in for many individuals. Kolek and Saunders (2008) note a “disconnect between students’ views of social Web sites as private and ‘safe’ places and the ease with which that information may be seen by others through licit or illicit means” (p. 6). They even suggest that “given the access controls available in Facebook, it has served to illustrate some of the most important elements of students’ information and the Internet: The illusion of privacy and the potential negative effects of online disclosures on students’ lives” (p. 21). All users should be made aware of the potential risks of disclosing too much information online since it is a public domain that for the most part is self-policed. As Paras (2006) explains in his analysis of Foucault’s discussions of discipline and regulation, opportunities are presented “in which populations [can] be monitored, assessed, and acted up with such a degree of refinement that power would be brought to bear upon each subcomponent of the group separately” (p. 103). Again, it is acknowledged that Foucault implies that the rendering of Bentham’s panopticon, by offering a space to monitor and assess situations unseen, distributes power to each individual. I argue that social networking sites, taking on the semblance of the panoptic structure, offer users the same courtesy. While it may only seem that the one who views secretly is in power, in actuality all participants have some form of power through freedom of expression: What is presented to be seen is still determined solely by the creator of the profile, who is an individualized self.

Since “Facebook provides a platform for self-expression or a means of identification” (Hart et al, 2008, p. 473), it is important that self-disclosure and perceptions of who can view what is actually disclosed are examined. Hart and colleagues note that “as a social networking site, Facebook assists the facilitation of social interaction offering a plethora of methods of interacting with friends, which is one of the necessities of a social network” (p. 473). Again, they highlight curiosity as a factor that

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Along the same lines as the curiosity factor, the researchers discovered that “the aspect of ‘stalking’ was found to be a common activity on Facebook, which was generally done in secret where users felt guilty at intruding on their friends’ privacy” (p. 473). In essence Hart and colleagues surmised that “as a social web service [Facebook] not only provides a great deal of social pleasure but provokes curiosity, provides a base for self expression and evokes memories of the past, along with a myriad of emotional and hedonic user experiences” (p. 474). A natural curiosity about new friends and acquaintances can lead to heightened information-seeking in relational development, which can lead to more serious issues of cyberstalking. As the popular definitions found at urbandictionary.com suggest, “Facebook stalking” is generally accepted among the site’s members as a consequence of putting personal information up for public consumption; however, the

same definition likens the act of “Facebook stalking” to that of “regular stalking,” which has interesting implications that will be explored further in my analysis.

Curiosity and Cyberstalking in the Digital Age

According to Alexy and his colleagues (2005), “over the past decade, the phenomenon of stalking has emerged as a salient social and political issue” (p. 279). Stalking is marked by “a pattern of harassing or threatening behavior” (p. 279). The researchers fundamentally believe that “the emergence of communication technologies, or ‘new media,’ such as the Internet, has provided an additional conduit and method for stalkers to identify and target their victims” (p. 279). With the advent of and immense popularity of social networking sites, cyberstalking has become a pertinent issue to law enforcement officials. After careful study, officials believe that “although the prevalence and incidence of cyberstalking remain unknown, anecdotal reports suggest that cyberstalking appears to be expanding at a rapid pace, especially among the nation’s youth” (p. 280). Therefore, Alexy and colleagues’ study aimed “to ascertain the labels, feelings, and behavioral reactions of college students about cyberstalking, to determine the prevalence and coping characteristics of cyberstalking victims, and to compare the labels, feelings, and behavioral reactions of cyberstalked to stalked victims” (p. 282). Their findings showed that “the average student used [the Internet] 5-6 hours a week” (p. 284); and they point out “the fact that first-year students were more likely to begin using the Internet at an earlier age” (p. 284) which indicates a necessity for studying its implications. However, this 2005 study is quite dated with respect to the rapidly changing

purposes of Internet use, and it is likely that students use the Internet for longer durations of time today for both research and recreational purposes.

Additionally, Alexy et al (2005) note that “the fact that little empirical research exists specifically addressing the phenomenon of cyberstalking is not surprising...” (p. 288); however, they do stress the need to “examine responses to a scenario on cyberstalking to see how... students classify negative behavior on the Internet and how they feel about it; it presents the students’ experiences with the Internet...” (p. 288). Research suggests that cyberstalking emerges as a cultural category in the digital age because social networking sites such as Facebook encourage users to perform surveillance and monitoring activities when checking up on their friends. Therefore, this research aims to discover how cyberstalking can become an exaggerated extension of social searching behaviors.

Panopticism

Social searching behaviors relate closely to the classic renderings of a virtual panopticon. In 1787, Jeremy Bentham proposed the idea of a “panopticon or inspection-house” (Bentham, 1995, p. 29) that was “applicable to any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection” (p. 29). Bentham’s plan for the panopticon revolved mostly around prison systems, and the idea was that “prisoners in the panopticon would wear masks...expressing the gravity of their offences: the prisoners would...stage their own guilt... on ‘the only occasion on which their eyes [would] have to encounter the public eye’” (Bozovic, 1995, p. 5). However, on most occasions, according to Bozovic (1995):

the prisoners would not know whether they were being watched, since the gaze of the public would be hidden from them: occasional visitors would only be allowed to look into the panopticon from a central inspection tower which would allow them to observe the prisoners while remaining invisible themselves. (p. 5-6)

This voyeuristic quality of Bentham's panopticon is relevant to the world of social networking: Members of social networking communities can view their friends' profiles at any time without their friends' knowledge. Depending on the privacy parameters one has for their Facebook profile, almost anyone can have access to the information users make available on their profiles. This relates directly to Bozovic's (1995) statement concerning Bentham's panopticon that "nothing can be achieved through reality that cannot be achieved as well through appearance" (p. 7). In essence, what one makes available through virtual means becomes reality for all who have access.

Furthermore, Bozovic (1995) asks "if the principal object...can be achieved by means of appearances...and if reality is entirely superfluous and even obstructive..., is it not then possible to achieve the same effect...through fiction?" (p. 7). Essentially, Bozovic explains Bentham's work as a juxtaposition between appearance and reality, which directly relates to the current debate between virtual and real spaces. Bozovic postulates that if what is depicted through appearance or fiction alone can be seen as reality, then "it would be possible to contribute to the overall happiness of the community without the slightest expense, without needing to sacrifice any of the...individual's happiness" (p. 7). Therefore, virtual communities can be accurately described as places of mutual give and take.

Because the line between virtual space and real space is blurred, Bozovic (1995) maintains that

even if we...were to produce the appearance by means of reality, we still could not entirely avoid relying on fiction. This is because the panopticon, reality itself, is already structured like a fiction. For the real panopticon to achieve its external objective...it must of course achieve its internal objective [that is, transgression]....Although the panopticon defers the innocent from committing offences by producing an appearance through reality, in order for this reality to be able to produce such an appearance at all, it must itself be sustained by another appearance, one that is not the effect of reality, but that is itself a fiction. (p. 7-8)

Essentially, the panoptic structure involves prisoners housed in a central location within view of a guard tower where the guards are either physically watching or giving the impression that they are watching the prisoners' every movement. This causes the prisoners to self-regulate because they believe that their actions are constantly being monitored from the guard tower. The ideas postulated by Bentham and later Michel Foucault are suggestive of user-generated social networking profiles such as those on Facebook. Online identities are often either over the top or very limited: Neither shows a clear picture of one's true identity, which in essence creates a fictional being that sustains an identity in a virtual space. With respect to panoptic features, social networking sites, and Facebook specifically, are unique because the watchers or guards are mostly random others and untrained eyes, as opposed to authority figures (though authority figures are present within networks as Facebook is now open to the public). Each member of the community takes on the role of the vulnerable prisoner who self-regulates based on who

they think is viewing their material while simultaneously acting as a guard who watches and imposes a sense of authority over the watched.

Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge and Individuality

Michel Foucault brought Bentham's ideas concerning panopticism into academic discussion in the 1970s. Foucault's work, "written in the mid-1970s, continues – surprisingly perhaps – to have a very real social relevance and resonance" (Downing, 2008, p. 85). According to Foucault's (1977) interpretation of Bentham's panopticon, "the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities" (p. 201). Using this as a model for a strict reading of the Facebook community, multiple users come together as an equal yet diverse group to form a virtual community where the act of viewing one another's profiles centrally is not seen as uncommon or as stalking; rather, it is a norm of the community. Essentially, this idea encompasses Foucault's thoughts that "the panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever being seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (p. 201-202).

Downing (2008) asserts that "the centrality to [Foucault's] overall thesis of the contention that power is intimately linked to sight and to being seen" and that "what is crucial...is the expression 'induce effects of power,' for the means of disciplining the population – both normal and abnormal – that Foucault proposes are not about a model of oppressive power but about a series of techniques that work so as to give the impression that force is being exercised, without it being traceable to any single source" (p. 81). So,

“in order to illustrate the changing nature of observation as a means of control through history” (p. 81) Foucault cites plague towns during the Middle Ages and what measures were taken for maintaining constant surveillance and controlling the situation. Resulting “in a situation whereby ‘inspection function ceaselessly’ and ‘the gaze is alert everywhere,’” (p. 81) the monitoring Foucault describes a “rigorous observation and policing” (p. 81) that is also applicable to social networking sites today.

Downing (2008) suggests that “modern techniques of surveillance become increasingly subtle and insidious, according to Foucault, once the ‘sovereignty of law’ is no longer an unimpeachable given” (p. 82). Therefore, to see without being seen is a key component with respect to power differentials. According to Downing, Bentham’s architectural structure, the panopticon “isolates its inmates from each other in separate cells, ensuring that each individual can be seen from the central point, but simultaneously separating him from his neighbors, an object of observation but never a ‘subject of communication’; effectively preventing plotting, insubordination or insurrection, since these are communal strategies of resistance” (p. 82). While this conceptualization is not exactly what goes on in social networking sites, the idea that viewers can see profiles without being known is intriguing because of power connotations: It is therefore quite reminiscent of the premise behind Bentham’s panopticon. Downing goes on to explain another aspect of the panopticon that is more in line with the operation of social networking sites: Explaining that since “the watcher cannot be seen or identified by the watched, the [watched] develop an impersonal and anonymous relationship with power. Without being able to verify the presence of the watcher, they soon behave as if they are being watched, without knowing for certain whether or not this is the case. Thus,

discipline becomes self-regulatory” (p. 82). Many times this kind of behavior happens within social networking sites when the image portrayed to the public comes into question.

Downing (2008) explains that “Foucault posits that modern culture is a ‘disciplinary society’ that works analogously to Bentham’s design for the panopticon, motivated and implemented by the move from ‘quarantine’ to the multiple and diverse operation of power in the most minute and apparently inconsequential aspects of social life...” (p. 83). Watching without being seen is actually a common practice within our social lives publicly; and the same can be said for our social lives online: People view profiles without the knowledge of the one being watched daily, which encompasses that idea that Foucault suggests, that “the effects of disciplinary power are not exercised from a single vantage point, but are mobile, multivalent and internal to the very fabric of our everyday life” (p. 83). Essentially, Downing explains that “the dynamics of power described in Foucault’s account are ones of internalization, invisibility, plurality, and discretion (...surveillance is transformed from a matter of external overseeing to a rigorous self-policing)” (p. 84). These are employed daily within the construction and maintenance of our own niches within the digital arena.

Foucault (1977) is concerned with the power objective behind the ‘see/being seen dyad’ that Bentham’s panopticon offers. He notes that the panopticon

...is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power.

Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up. The

ceremonies, the rituals, the marks by which the sovereign's surplus power was manifested are useless. There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference. (p. 202).

Observation is important here. The act of looking, of gazing into another's life unseen, is the primary goal of the panopticon. Foucault stresses that with panopticism "a similar concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytical arrangement of space" (p. 203) surfaces. Ultimately,

thanks to its mechanisms of observation, [panopticism] gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behavior, knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over all surfaces on which power is exercised. (p. 204)

Bentham's panopticon operates through a series of unseen glances into the lives of others without their knowledge; arguably, participation within the social networking site, Facebook, functions in much the same way. Foucault asserts that "the panoptic schema...was destined to spread throughout the social body" (p. 207). Its purpose was to amplify the act of looking, and activity on Facebook appears to be a quintessential manifestation of panopticism in the digital age because it offers a central location for users to view the profiles of their friends and acquaintances without being seen. Essentially, Facebook users take on the role of the prisoner and the guard simultaneously: Users are constantly under social scrutiny, in both the real world and the virtual world, by virtue of the site's design.

Essentially what Foucault suggests "is a recognition that power does not exist 'outside of' or separately from the individual body, as on oppressive or repressive

constraint. Rather, power is the complex and ever-present force which enables us to become human subjects within... society” (Pini, 2004, p. 160). Pini points out that for Foucault “where there is knowledge, there is power. ‘Knowledge’ of ourselves and of others is never simply a neutral or objective ‘understanding’. Rather, this knowledge is always bound up with our specific historical and cultural location” (p. 160). In fact, “it is only through the power/knowledge processes of surveying, naming, classifying and coding” (p. 161) that anything is ascribed meaning.

Furthermore, Foucault suggests that “we ... classify ourselves, and ‘know’ ourselves through the same principles of identifying, naming and disciplining” (Pini, 2004, p. 162). He believes that “all knowledge (about ourselves, others and the world in general) carries power implications. In order for us to be subjects in the world, we develop a subjectivity (a knowledge of our existence)” (p. 162). Taking Foucault’s notion of how we classify ourselves into account with respect to social networking websites, the creation of public profiles on sites such as Facebook and MySpace allows people to carve a space for themselves in the public arena. Through identification and naming on personal profiles, social networking site users create an image of themselves that is transferred to other users. This transfer carries with it power implications, as Foucault suggests, as other users begin to negotiate truth and knowledge based on what information is provided on the user profile. Power, in this case, is integral because, as Pini asserts, “Foucault’s analysis of power carries enormous implications not only for thinking about how we come to know ourselves, but also for thinking about how we come to know others” (p. 162). In order to negotiate the virtual reality created by profiles on social networking websites, users must adhere to the information their friends and

acquaintances provide as the only viable source of knowledge. Therefore, Pini points out that "...Foucault's model of power/knowledge seems to offer a...pessimistic view of our being in the world. We can never escape the workings of power because it is only through power/knowledge that we can come to be who we are" (p. 163).

Pini (2004) also suggests that "what is fundamental to Foucauldian thinking...is the argument that selves (which are always embodied) are socially constructed. What this means is that our selves do not emerge 'naturally' but are produced within a wider historical and social context" (p. 164). Foucault coined the term 'technologies of the self' in order "to get at the many ways in which we create or transform our own selves... These 'technologies of the self'... include all the different ways in which we 'work upon' our bodies so as to become a self and achieve a sense of fulfillment" (p. 164). Pini uses Foucault's notion of 'technologies of the self' to explain how contemporary youth exert power and control in their own lives. Stating that "clearly, for young people the developing adult body has always provided one of the primary sites for the execution of control" (p. 164), Pini sites "the use of drugs, cigarettes, alcohol etc. and the cultivation of a particular fashion for oneself...as attempts to stake out an independence from parental and societal regulation of [their] bodies" (p. 164-165). The same can be said for social networking websites becoming a place to exert independence and control over certain aspects of one's life and the perceptions that come along with it, particularly as fostered online.

As years passed, there was a change in Foucault's academic thought processes: He went from more classical ways of thinking to modernistic conceptions of power and knowledge. Paras (2006) notes that

with the passage to modernity... there emerged the paradoxical figure that... was...capable of serving as the foundation of all knowledge. If man was the universal knower, he nevertheless...encountered his own finitude at every turn: his discourses showed him that he was merely an object of nature to be deployed by systems (of language, or production, of living beings) that manifestly preceded him. (p. 24)

At a 1974 conference in Brazil, Foucault explained his position further, suggesting that “individuality is...completely controlled by power, and that we are individualized, at bottom, by power itself. In other words.... individualization is [not] opposed to power, but on the contrary, ...our individuality – the obligatory identity of each of us – is the effect and instrument of power” (p. 78). For Foucault, Paras explains that “individualizing is a means within an economy of power: a way of making delimited populations more effective at some particular task. This is what Foucault meant when he claimed in *Discipline and Punish* that ‘the individual is...a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power known as ‘discipline’” (p. 78-79). Furthermore, Paras notes that

the second notion that Foucault was able to combat was that which located in human individuality a site of resistance to normalization. Psychoanalyzed, liberated selves are not bastions of freedom from a power that stands outside and against them; rather, the very idea that we have a true self, an identity that persists, is evidence of the continual action upon us of a kind of power that works by documenting, by following longitudinally, by individualizing. (p. 79)

Social networking sites allow us to carve out a niche in the digital arena, allowing us to individualize and rationalize an identity to project for other users to see a true representation of the self.

However, Foucault warns us to not be fooled by rose-colored glasses, thinking that we have power and freedom within our own individuality. On the contrary, Foucault suggests that “individuality is imposed. Nothing would be more foolish than the attempt to free ourselves by asserting our individuality – by brandishing, as it were, our identity cards” (Paras, 2006, p. 79). Foucault further deconstructs the so-called individuals, explaining that one is

...no longer seen as the pure product of mechanisms of domination, [and] appears as the complex result of an interaction between outside coercion and techniques of the self. Mechanisms of power..., no longer seen as agents of invasive observation and control, appear as chastened overseers regulating their territory and population, at least in part, according to the dictates of objective knowledge. (p. 94-95)

Essentially, Foucault’s notion fits in perfectly with the idea of social networking sites operating as panopticons: Each user regulates their profile and those who have access to it by setting privacy limitations based on the climate of the social environment in which they find themselves.

Foucault’s notion of discipline comes into play here with this discussion of regulation and individuality. He suggests that “...individuals were the product of highly rationalized discursive systems; they were the effect of a modern configuration power...called... ‘discipline’” (Paras, 2006, p. 103). According to Downing (2008),

“Foucault tells us that ‘the exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible’” (p. 80-81). This notion of “discipline...created the conditions in which populations could be monitored, assessed, and acted up with such a degree of refinement that power would be brought to bear upon each subcomponent of the group separately” (Paras, 2006, p. 103). Again, Foucault seems to be suggesting that Bentham’s panopticon, which offers a place to monitor and assess situations unseen, distributes power to each individual. While it may only seem that the one who views secretly is in power, in actuality all participants have some form of power through freedom of expression: What is presented to be seen is still determined solely by the creator of the profile, who is an individualized self.

In 1980, Foucault asked during a lecture “Why, in what form, in a society like our own, does such a strong link exist between the exercise of power and the obligation for individuals to make of themselves, in procedures for the manifestation of truth...essential actors? ...” (Paras, 2006, p. 115). Paras believes that, in essence, Foucault was asking why must we “engage in activities in which we speak the truth of ourselves aloud? Why do we experience a link between the functioning of power and the requirement to ‘tell the truth’ about who we are?” (p. 115). Ahead of his time, these questions posed by Foucault describe what happens when users create new profiles on social networking websites. Social practice comes into play here, as people begin following trends and ‘arts of living’ in order to set up their online identities. Foucault describes ‘arts of living’ as “practices that, at one time, had enjoyed a considerable importance within Western societies” (p.

127). Practices could also be defined as “intentional and voluntary practices by which men not only fix rules of conduct for themselves, but seek to transform themselves, to modify themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life a work that bears certain aesthetic values and respond to certain criteria of style” (p. 127). Joining social networking sites has users coming together in so-called ‘communities of practice’ where they find like others who often share common beliefs, ideas, and values.

The theoretical concept behind the theory of communities of practice is a different perspective that “places learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world” (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). According to Wenger, ‘communities of practice’ is a social theory of learning, containing four premises:

1. We are social beings. Far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning.
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises – such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry, being convivial, growing up as a boy or a girl, and so forth.
3. Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is of active engagement in the world.
4. Meaning – our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful – is ultimately what learning is to produce. (p. 4)

Wenger asserts that “the primary focus of this theory is on learning as social participation. Participation... refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation

to these communities... Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (p. 4). Therefore, joining communities on social networking sites as active participants helps us to construct an identity based on the community and participation from that point on shapes what we do, who we are, and how we interpret things, which fully encompasses the Foucauldian notion of power. In fact, Wenger suggests that “in spite of curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice” (p. 6). Essentially, as we carve out niches and form communities within the public realm, these communities, in turn, shape and mold us into specific individuals.

Since they are virtually everywhere, Wenger (1998) asserts that “communities of practice are an integral part of our daily lives. They are so informal and so pervasive that they rarely come into explicit focus, but for the same reasons they are also quite familiar” (p. 7). Our participation in these communities “has broad implications for what it takes to understand and support learning. For individuals, it means that learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. For communities, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members...” (p. 7). Wenger describes theories of social practice as explaining “the production and reproduction of specific ways of engaging with the world. They are concerned with everyday activity and real-life settings, but with an emphasis on the social systems of shared resources by which groups organize and coordinate their activities, mutual relationships, and interpretations of the world” (p. 13).

Wenger (1998) goes on to explain that “we all have our own theories and ways of understanding the world, and our communities of practice are places where we develop, negotiate, and share them” (p. 48). Defining practice as “a process by which we can experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful” (p. 51), Wenger uses the term participation “to describe the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises” (p. 55). Our participation in communities of practice therefore suggests that we experience a specific and meaningful interaction by our association with friends and acquaintances within social communities, real and virtual, and are shaped by the interactions we experience in a special way.

Late in his career, Foucault (1988) developed the notion of ‘technologies of the self.’ Known for his lectures, Foucault broadened the scope of his power/knowledge model through the use of technology. However, the technologies to which he refers are not like the modern technologies we know and use now in the 21st century. Foucault explains that

as a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these ‘technologies,’ each a matrix of practical reason: 1. technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; 2. technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; 3. technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to a certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; 4. technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and

souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (p. 18).

Foucault suggests that “these... technologies hardly ever function separately, although each one of them is associated with...domination. Each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills, but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes” (p. 18). His description, again ahead of its time, describes what users go through on social networking sites as they project profiles for consumption by friends and acquaintances. Knowing oneself and one’s acquaintances well enough to project an accurate and positive image is key when negotiating the digital arena.

Foucault (1988) is “more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self” (p. 19). Concerned with the practices “constituted in Greek as *epimelesthai sautou*, ‘to take care of yourself,’ ‘the concern with self,’ ‘to be concerned, to take care of yourself’” (p. 19), he notes that “the precept ‘to be concerned with oneself’ was, for the Greeks, one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life” (p. 19). The same precepts, to know oneself and to be concerned with oneself, are integral to creating and maintaining positive online identities.

Foucault (1988) further explains that “it was generally acknowledged that it was good to be reflective... to set aside a few moments a day...for a retreat into [one]self” (p. 27), and that “writing was also important in the culture of taking care of oneself. One of

the main features of taking care involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed” (p. 27). Foucault’s reflections can strangely be equated to practices on social networking sites today. Writing about oneself and relaying personal details on to profiles for public and even internal scrutiny is arguably one of the main functions for social networking sites. As an unconventional haven for public reflection, social networking sites such as Facebook offer users a place to review and evaluate certain aspects of daily life and offer others the opportunity to weigh in on decisions made and thoughts shared within the public space of a Facebook profile. Foucault (1988) suggests that

the new concern for self involved a new experience of self. The new form of the experience of the self is to be seen ... when the introspection becomes more and more detailed. A relation developed between writing and vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent. (p. 28)

This kind of introspection suggests that “a culture of silence becomes more and more important” (p. 32). This culture of silence is exacerbated by the panoptic features of social networking sites because it affords users the ability to look without being seen, to monitor unnoticed, and to make judgments with no other form of contact apart from the silent observance. This culture of silence is therefore laden with questions of power and individuality.

According to Peters (1997), “the aim of modern power is to make all bodies visible to one person” (p. 77). Citing the structure of Bentham’s panopticon, those under scrutiny, “never knowing whether they are being watched at a given moment, internalize this gaze and become guardians of their own behavior. Every citizen becomes a prisonmaster and every soul a panoptic gallery” (p. 77). According to Foucault (as cited in Peters, 1997) “the Panopticon is the nightmare of...systematically distorted communication: the inmates...are objects of information, not subjects of communication” (p. 77). While social networking appears to give people freedom of expression, Foucault argues that it is actually “a trap. However one positions oneself with regard to the Enlightenment and its attending notions of emancipation and visibility” (p. 77) is not really freeing at all: In fact, people have to be more careful with the information they divulge on social networking sites because there is actually an elimination of community, based on the panoptic gaze users adopt. The digital age encourages curiosity online.

Surveillance: One of the Key Uses of Facebook

Stalking online is an important issue; however, many users consider much of the activity on Facebook to be less threatening and less oppressive than the terms ‘stalking’ and ‘cyberstalking’ suggest: It seems as though most users exhibit a healthy curiosity when it comes to social browsing and social searching for their friends and acquaintances. Joinson (2008) paints the picture this way: “If ‘social searching’ is a public good, then reciprocity rules would dictate that by enabling a degree of surveillance for oneself, one should also be able to engage in reciprocal surveillance of others” (p. 1028). Essentially, Joinson suggests that

The use of Facebook to search for new people loaded on the same factor as the use of Facebook to research offline contacts. This ‘virtual people watching’ was represented in [social investigation and social network surfing], with the important distinction that [social network surfing] relied primarily on ‘friend of friend’ connections, while [social investigation] represented targeted investigation of people met offline, or searched for. (p. 1034)

According to the data that Joinson collected in his study, “it would seem...that ‘keeping in touch’ may in actuality refer to ‘checking up on regularly’ ... [which] it is important to design content gratification alongside the ability to build and maintain social connections” (Joinson, 2008, p. 1035). Surveillance via Facebook allows for exploration of why some users are drawn to the social networking site. According to Joinson, “since users’ desire to engage in surveillance of their peers also motivates the frequency of site visit, this also poses a unique challenge in balancing users’ privacy concerns and controls...” (p. 1035). Balancing privacy settings on Facebook aids in online safety and offers users a more enjoyable experience in connecting with friends and acquaintances within their social network.

Since people are drawn to social networking, Lampe and colleagues (2006) make it known that “Facebook may foster relationship building by allowing users to track other members of their community” (p. 167) and that the “‘surveillance’ function allows an individual to track the actions, beliefs and interests of the larger groups to which they belong” (p. 167). In fact, the researchers assert that “this type of surveillance may be classified by the goals of users in search for others” (p. 167). Social searching is identified here as one of the primary uses of social networking sites in particular.

Lampe and colleagues (2006) distinguish a difference between social searching and social browsing in their study: Social searching is defined as “us[ing] the site to investigate specific people with whom they share an offline connection to learn more about them” (p. 167) while social browsing is defined by “us[ing] the site to find people or groups online with whom they would want to connect offline” (p. 167). Their study shows “support for the idea that Facebook members are using the site to engage in social searches, i.e. find out more about people in their offline communities” (p. 169). This is important because it shows that Facebook users typically use the site reminiscent of Bentham’s panopticon to discover information about their friends and acquaintances without having to ask for information. This supports my argument that Facebook takes on the panoptic features postulated by Bentham and explained in further detail by Foucault. While neither theorist could predict the popularity of social networking sites and how closely their features align with panopticism, the current study hopes to show that their writings concerning behavior, power, and identity are predictive of social networking site users, specifically Facebook users, in the twenty first century.

Effects of Social Networking on Privacy / Strategies to Cope

Some officials have proposed topics of utmost importance in order to keep the safety of all users a top priority. Kolek and Saunders (2008) ultimately believe that important topics to address include information about who has access to student profiles, how a student can restrict access to his or her profile, and the potential ramifications of posting address information or pictures of illegal or embarrassing activities. Although some students may ignore these cautions, many students may

be unaware of the possible consequences of these postings and once made aware will either take steps to limit their exposure on Facebook, or at least consider the potential ramifications of different types of disclosures. (p. 18)

The researchers note that while “there are many unanswered questions about the effect of Facebook and other social networking websites on students’ development, social integration, and on student life in general” (p. 20), the general consensus is that social networking ultimately helps to bridge gaps and help people make connections with people they may not otherwise have the means to contact.

Furthermore, there is a need “to examine the extent to which the use of Facebook may enhance students’ sense of community, integration, and connections with other students at institutions of higher education” (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 20). However, there is also a need “to educate students about the potential pitfalls of posting different types of information about themselves on Facebook and other websites” (p. 20). Having knowledge of online etiquette, especially with regard to what and how much information to self-disclose, is a key factor in maintaining safety online, because one can never be sure just who is accessing their profile and for what reasons.

So... Who’s Really Looking?

According to Lampe and his colleagues (2006), “the strongest expectations are that peers who have some sort of offline connection – either by virtue of prior friendship, common classes, or having met at a social event – constitute the audience for one’s profile” (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 169). Basically, “those students using the site anticipate that their audience [comprises] peers, rather than other university members

like faculty and administration” (p. 170). It should also be said that all users have a jaded outlook on who is actually viewing their profiles; the lack of face-to-face interaction that the Internet provides seems to be less inhibiting with regards to the amount of information people are willing to disclose. This is also an interesting component to study: Some Internet users appear to just throw caution to the wind when it comes to interactions taking place with friends and acquaintances on social networking sites.

According to Wood and Smith (2005), “one of the rhetorical effects of the Web has been the ways in which the globally accessible messages posted to it address particular audiences” (p. 15). Messages can be sent and accessed from one side of the world to the other within minutes. Since Facebook makes it easier for people to connect with one another regardless of time and distance, the social networking site has become a part of the contemporary lifestyle for students and professionals alike. According to Facebook’s platform, the site “is a part of millions of people’s lives all around the world providing unparalleled distribution potential for applications and the opportunity to build a business that is highly relevant to people’s lives” (Facebook Factsheet, 2008, para. 4). danah boyd (2007) notes that mediated publics such as Facebook have four qualities, including persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences, that users should take into account as they are creating profiles for their ‘friends’. Since boyd believes that “participants in social network sites imagine their audience and speak according to the norms that they perceive to be generally accepted” (boyd, 2007, p. 3). Exhibitionism and voyeuristic tendencies online have become the norm for many Facebook users, which merits academic study as to the types of disclosure that are taking

place, how much is too much, and what people expect to discover about their ‘friends’ each time they log in to the social networking site.

Essentially, the current research will be guided by three central interest areas. First, I will explore how Facebook users might utilize the site as an opportunity to practice various degrees of social surveillance. Next, I will examine how the behavior of Facebook users is described with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism, especially regarding personal identities on public profiles. Finally, I will explore how social searching can lead to an overall idea of cyberstalking. Practically speaking, I will also examine whether Facebook users consider themselves cyberstalkers or something less offensive. Ultimately, the following original research will seek to answer these overarching areas of interest with respect to the notions of power alluded to by Michel Foucault through the panoptic features the site offers by virtue of its design.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This research aims to discover how notions of power emerge through three central interest areas, including how Facebook users might respond to daily use of the site to practice various degrees of social surveillance; how the behavior of Facebook users is shaped by what is posted on public profiles, especially with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism; and how social-searching can lead to cyberstalking. Long, qualitative questionnaires were chosen as a primary method for this study because they encourage self-reporting. A self-report is an integral methodology because it serves as “a primary source of data...researchers rely on the answers that research participants provide to learn about individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and to monitor societal trends” (Schwartz, 1999, p. 93).

Prior to the present study, three pilot interviews and a pilot focus group were completed to determine a question route for the qualitative questionnaires used in the present study. The pilot interviews revealed data concerning usage of Facebook, perceived proficiency with the site, ideas concerning disclosure as it pertains to Facebook, and definitions of the terms voyeurism and exhibitionism, and the relatively new term, “Facebook-stalking” emerged as focus areas from interviews completed in Winter 2009.

Additionally, a focus group was held on June 6, 2009, as an exploratory effort to generate ideas concerning the most current user practices on Facebook in order to distinguish online behaviors and senses of voyeurism and exhibitionism among faithful users. From this discussion, I learned that many users cite Facebook as a source of procrastination and distraction, which is interesting because many students and adults

alike have commented on the social networking site's ability to draw its users in for extended periods of time. Longer periods of time, according to some researchers, imply the possibility of surveillance activities taking place during online visits (e.g., Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006). Most users joined Facebook because someone suggested that they should, which implies that other friends are already in the network. Keeping track of old friends and keeping in touch with contacts were two motivating factors for originally joining the site.

Based on the information learned from the two pilot studies, long, qualitative questionnaires are the method of choice for this research. Usually considered to be more quantitative in nature, the short answers supplied by the participants were analyzed qualitatively for the present study. In qualitative research, the participant's personal experience can be vividly reconstructed for academic purposes using words of the participant's choosing which makes the information shared not only relevant for academic study but also more personal. The chosen methodology is particularly helpful in understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants through their stories and explanations; gathering information about processes that cannot be otherwise observed effectively; and exploring ideas developed in the field and attempting to apply them to everyday life (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The questionnaire created for the present study has open-ended questions, and a qualitative coding scheme was employed to analyze responses. Other researchers (e.g., Woolley, Bowen & Bowen, 2004; Jobes, et al, 2004) have employed similar methods in order "to add a qualitative component to a previously quantitative instrument" (Woolley, Bowen, & Bowen, 2004, p. 2).

Furthermore, because the qualitative questionnaire offers first-hand accounts of personal experience, it was chosen as the most valuable methodology to discern college-aged students' opinions of and experiences with Facebook. According to Chernow (2007), insights from the participants are invaluable pieces to a puzzle that original research attempts to construct. Sometimes the opinions are gathered from "formal interviews. But other times, and these time are often richer, these insights come out of informal conversations" (p. 118). Usually these conversations occur in face-to-face settings where the researcher can "get a firsthand view with an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and pursue detours that pop up as...questions are answered" (p. 118). However, for the purposes of the present research, the questionnaires were completed solely online and were initiated via Facebook itself.

While taking this approach toward the methodology appears to be somewhat limiting because personal, firsthand interactions are lost in favor of virtual interaction, there are many positive attributes that make it a viable practice for gathering data for the purposes of this specific research. Other disadvantages include respondents misinterpreting questions and inaccuracy of self-reporting (Schwartz, 1999); however, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages as the questionnaires encourage the participants to find their own voice. Administered confidentially online, respondents were provided with a sense of protection that face-to-face interactions do not offer. Furthermore, online interaction, according to Walther (1996), can sometimes be "just as personal as face-to-face interaction, or even... surpass[ing] face-to-face in some interpersonal aspects" (p. 4). Furthermore, Walther reports that "combinations of media attributes, social phenomena, and social-psychological processes may lead [computer-

mediated communication] to become ‘hyperpersonal,’ that is, to exceed face-to-face interpersonal communication” (p. 5).

Keeping these notions of computer-mediated communication in mind, a public Facebook group was created soliciting help from college-aged, self-described ‘motivated’ Facebook users in order to gather the desired data (see Figure 1). The assumption that typically ‘motivated’ Facebook users respond to group invitations was employed as reasoning for this type of recruitment. Exactly 100 (male = 48, female = 52) of the researcher’s Facebook ‘friends’ were invited to join the Facebook group.

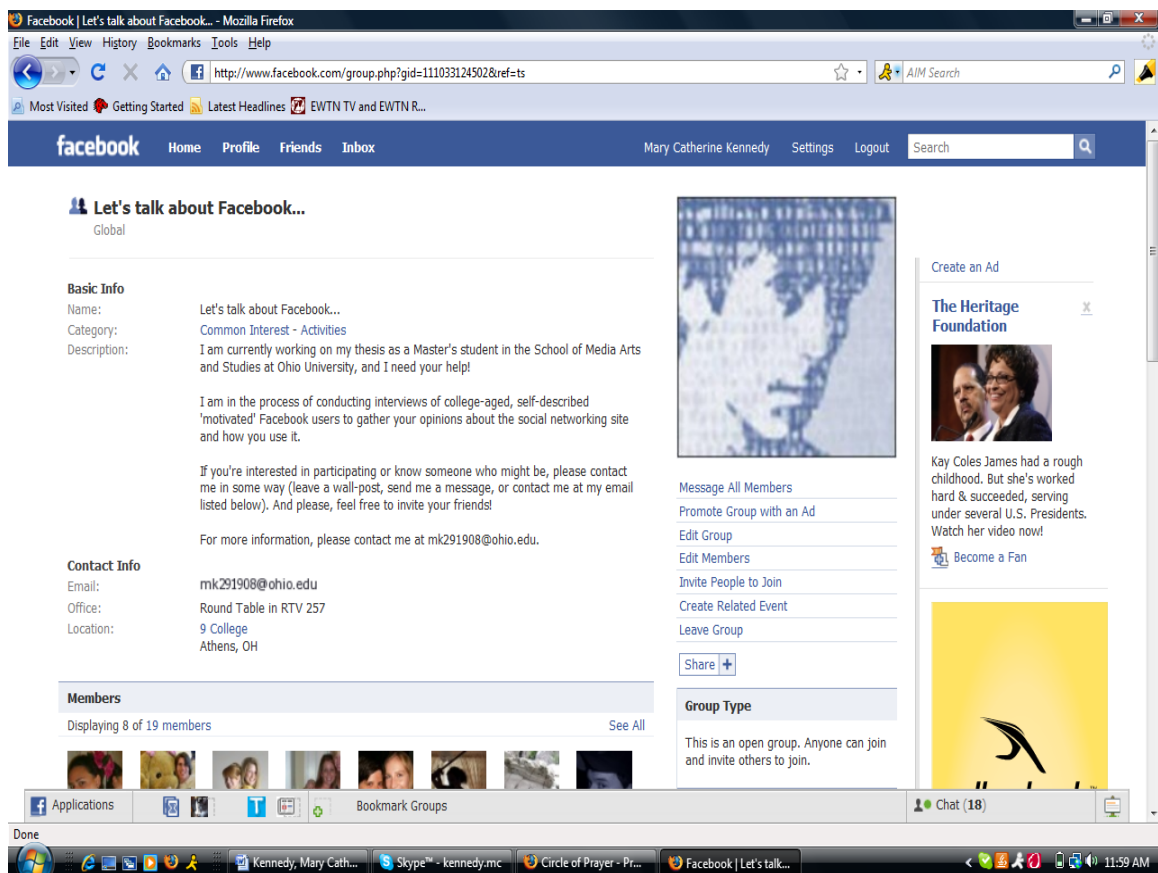


Figure 1. Facebook screenshot of ‘Let’s Talk About Facebook’ Group page.

Captured October 1, 2009

A message to potential participants concerning the study was posted in the group description section which read:

I am currently working on my thesis as a Master's student in the School of Media Arts and Studies at Ohio University, and I need your help! I am in the process of conducting interviews of college-aged, self-described 'motivated' Facebook users to gather your opinions about the social networking site and how you use it. If you're interested in participating or know someone who might be, please contact me in some way (leave a wall-post, send me a message, or contact me at my email listed below). And please, feel free to invite your friends! ...

Facebook users who decided to join the group were then contacted via Facebook message with more details concerning the study. Potential participants were made aware that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time.

A self-proclaimed motivated Facebook user, the primary investigator has approximately 470 'friends' on Facebook between the ages of 10 and 65. The 100 invitations were sent to acquaintances between the ages of 18 and 35 as this reflects the leading demographic of Facebook users. This population was targeted because according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, a majority of online adults maintain a profile on a social networking site. Additionally the Project notes that "social network users are more likely to be students" (Lenhart, 2009, p. 4).

The group invitations were sent with the understanding that only responses from current university students or recent graduates (none before May 2007) would be deemed appropriate in order to account for both non-traditional students and Facebook users who

were a part of the community since its inception in 2004 when it was limited to college students only. Additionally, responses were taken from acquaintances who have little to no interaction (i.e. those who are otherwise removed from the researcher's social life outside of Facebook interactions) with the researcher's daily life in order to limit the possibility of encountering responses from participants who are familiar with the investigator's line of research. The researcher closely monitored the group page between August 5 and August 13, 2009. By August 13, twenty (male = 8, female = 12) Facebook users had joined the group. Of the twenty users, three (male = 1, female = 2, including the principal investigator) were ruled out because of their familiarity with the present study. Still, nineteen motivated Facebook users were initially identified as possible participants (including the 17 eligible group members and two users who contacted the principal investigator via contact information found on the group page). Of the nineteen (male = 8, female = 11) possible participants, fifteen (male = 5, female = 10) expressed interest in continuing with the online interview process. Therefore, fifteen online interviews were distributed, each containing twenty-five questions pertaining to the participants' specific use of computers and Facebook.

Online methodology was utilized because they "allow the participant to describe what is meaningful or important to him or her using his or her own words rather than being restricted to predetermined categories, thus participants may feel more relaxed and candid" (Sewell, 2005, np). Furthermore, Sewell points out that "...results 'ring true' to participants and make intuitive sense to lay audiences" (np). Twelve of these questionnaires were administered via Facebook message while three were conducted via

personal email at the participant's request. Nine completed questionnaires were received by August 24, 2009.

Once the questionnaires were received from the participants, all responses were compiled confidentially in a word processing document. Responses were identified by demographic characteristics including gender, age, and geographic location. Responses were analyzed to identify recurring themes that emerged. These themes were then separated into four analyst-constructed categories. These categories suggest a cycle of specific behaviors, as detailed in the results section.

The first three categories included data that is considered to be common knowledge about Facebook in general. However, the fourth category provided data that was most salient to the current research. Follow-up online interviews were conducted with 6 of the 9 original participants between September 23 and October 2, 2009. Responses from these interviews were compiled in a word processing document for analysis, and themes that emerged from these responses were labeled as microthemes for the overarching fourth category identified from the data of the original interviews.

CHAPTER 3: ORIGINAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Results

Again, the primary purpose of this research is to understand the general use of and disclosure practices on the social networking site Facebook by a subset of college-aged users. Additionally, it aims to discover specific perceptions concerning disclosure practices and the idea of “Facebook stalking” of various users within this subset. Facebook’s evolution and prominence in the public sphere is also of interest. As such, fifteen online interviews were granted from the nineteen eligible participants in the Facebook group created for research purposes. Of the fifteen online solicitations, nine responses were received. The respondents were between the ages of 18 and 27, two males and seven females, despite equal distribution of invitations to participate among males and females. Two of the participants are recent college graduates (1 male and 1 female), two are entering freshmen (1 male and 1 female), one is a sophomore (female), three are seniors (female), and one is a self-described “super” senior or fifth year student (female).

The interview guide was created based on information garnered from three pilot interviews and a pilot focus group. In the pilot studies, data concerning usage of Facebook, perceived proficiency with the site, ideas concerning disclosure as it pertains to Facebook, and working definitions of the terms voyeurism, exhibitionism, and “Facebook-stalking” were revealed. Themes that emerged from the pilot interviews include maintaining appropriate levels of disclosure, creating accurate profiles that are true to one’s identity, and stalking or monitoring the profiles of friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, focus group discussions revealed that many users cite Facebook as a source of procrastination and distraction. Again, this is a key finding

because many students and adults alike have commented on the social networking site's ability to draw its users in for extended periods of time, and longer periods of time, according to some researchers, imply the possibility of surveillance activities taking place during online visits (e.g., Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006). As noted earlier, most users joined Facebook because someone suggested that they should, which implies that other friends are already in the network. Keeping track of old friends and keeping in touch with contacts were two motivating factors for originally joining the site. Therefore, questions concerning friends, profile monitoring practices, and Facebook's prominence in daily routines were asked of each participant in the present study.

Essentially, the online interviews for the present study exposed that, as expected, checking Facebook ranks high for motivated users as one of the first sites visited upon logging into a computer. Many participants report logging into Facebook and checking in on it anytime they are at a computer and in between doing other tasks online. Users described Facebook as "a life-enriching tool" that is useful for many things, especially to keep in touch since the interface offers "a great way to stay connected and communicate," according to an 18-year-old, female college freshman. A 19-year-old female college sophomore agreed, adding: "...but I wish I didn't depend on it so much. It can be distracting when I need to get something done which is very annoying." The social networking site offers its users a way to keep in touch with people, and it offers a window into the lives of their friends who aren't at the same schools.

As a social medium, Facebook offers its users constant connectivity. Members can update their profiles, post links, send messages, and write on walls at any given time of day. To this end, Facebook users are constantly connected which "makes it easy to

reach out and get in touch with someone,” which a 27-year-old recent college graduate suggests might be a “kind of interaction compared to when it took more effort to get out a card and write it and send it, but... when you make things easier people are more likely to do them. ...[and] Facebook makes a lot of positive things in our lives more convenient.” Convenience levels and the ease with which one can contact friends and acquaintances make communicating with friends via the social networking site very popular. Being on Facebook makes users feel like they “belong and are part of something bigger,” according to an 18-year-old male college freshman. Facebook offers a user-friendly interface where users remain constantly connected. The site has permeated our social lives to such an extent that it is not only checked every time we log on to a computer, but we also often stay logged in “just in case someone starts a conversation.” Facebook makes us constantly available for our friends.

As discussed previously, other researchers have found that a certain sense of relationship maintenance and social searching takes places within the Facebook community. According to Lampe, Ellison and Steinfeld (2006), social searching is “the use of social networking software to increase knowledge about people in an offline social network” (p. 169). Since Facebook offers features that afford users a unique look into the lives of their friends through a newsfeed and notifications that appear upon logging into the site, Lampe and his colleagues suggest that “Facebook members seem to be using Facebook as a surveillance tool for maintaining previous relationships, and as a ‘social search’ tool by which they investigate people they’ve met offline” (p. 170). For the present study, when asked ‘why did you join the Facebook community?’, it became obvious that many of the participants joined the community because their friends were

already on it. According to the 27-year old female participant, joining Facebook “seemed like a natural progression [after being on MySpace]. I probably signed up because someone encouraged me to or to keep in touch with someone specific...” Staying in communication, keeping in touch, and networking were strong motives in joining the social networking community for all nine participants, regardless of their age or when they joined.

In the same vein, when the participants were asked ‘why do you use Facebook?’, responses were mixed but generally reflected the desire to stay in touch with friends. Being a part of the Facebook community has seemingly become a requirement for socializing with friends online. Many participants admit to using the site to check up on their friends to see what is happening in their lives. The site also makes it easier to find out more about people you have just met. Clearly, the motivation to use Facebook is based on the desire to keep in touch with friends.

Keeping the social relationships built on the website in mind, when asked about what is typically done upon logging in to Facebook, an 18-year old male freshman explains “I read the news feed to see if there is anything ‘interesting’ that might require more ‘investigation.’ If any of the quizzes look cool, I might take some as well to compare with friends.” Also referred to as their home page, other users describe “check[ing] for notifications and messages, see[ing] who is currently online, scroll[ing] the homepage to see what others have written recently...look[ing] at applications, [and] view[ing] pictures; ...reply[ing] to any wall posts or picture comments I may have received, updat[ing] my status, [and] read[ing] the mini feed to see what other people are doing.” The 27-year-old recent college graduate explains that she first checks her

notifications “[and] that determines what I do next. ...then if I don’t have any notifications or new messages, I just read what’s on my news feed...then if I stay at the computer, I leave [Facebook] open so I can be the first to know everything new that pops up.” Facebook affords friends and family who are separated by great distances and even those who are not the opportunity to keep up with the minor details of their daily lives.

That said, the participants were asked to describe the kind of people who are on their friends list. Answers included coworkers; family; friends from elementary, middle, and high school; college friends; friends of friends; close friends; family friends; and church friends. Most friends are within a few years of the respondent’s age. Most of the participants said that they knew or at least met those who were on their friends list. Others, however, report sometimes not knowing all of the people on their friends list. Participants were also asked to recall approximately how many friends they have on their friends list and whether or not they communicated with all of them. Answers ranged from thirty-four to 650. However, none of the participants said that they communicate with everyone on their friends list, including the ones with less than 100 friends. In fact, most participants reported only being in regular communication with a small subset of their total friends list.

Just because they do not regularly communicate with everyone on their friends list does not mean that profiles go unchecked or unnoticed. Therefore, the participants were asked about how frequently they visited their friends’ pages. Their responses were not surprising, as self-reports concerning online behavior tend to underestimate reality. The 27-year-old female recent college graduate admitted to checking “people’s profiles sometimes. Usually it is someone that I am curious about, I will see what people have

been saying on their wall...and see what I can glean about them from that” while the 18-year-old male freshman noted that while he didn’t really check profiles very often, he does note changes and “follow[s] interesting conversations that appear on the newsfeed.” Interesting statuses are also worthy to be followed, according to the 18-year-old female freshman. Other participants cite boredom as their reason for clicking around and visiting random friend profiles.

Some of the participants admitted to aimlessly clicking links and viewing random friends’ profiles out of boredom and natural curiosity, so the next question to be asked in a natural progression concerned who the participants think is actually viewing their profile. Their responses were somewhat surprising: Many participants acknowledged the fact that they have their profiles set to where only their friends can view it, and others reported not thinking that anyone would be that interested in their lives to take the time to look. Others have relatively naive views that only people their age, people who went to school with them, or people that they see and talk to often are looking. The 19-year-old college sophomore ventured to guess that perhaps her friends were looking, but “I guess I don’t think that someone who didn’t really know me would want to. Maybe they do though, who knows?” However, one participant remarked:

Any and everybody [is looking]. I have thought about it; that’s why my profile is private unless you are a friend or in my network. Some of my albums are very limited for this reason. Grad schools I apply to, potential bosses will look at my profile.

Others still expressed that they would like to know who is viewing their profile out of sheer curiosity. The 24-year-old recent graduate admits that he “often thinks about who is

looking at [his] profile and why, but [he] really [doesn't] know which of [his] friends specifically would look at [his] profile on a regular basis,” and he adds that he does “not regularly update [his] profile with ‘rich’ media like photos, videos, etc so [he] doubt[s] [that he’s] on [his] friends’ radar.” Many of the participants seem to share the opinion that most of their friends are uninterested in keeping up with their profiles unless they update it frequently or share interesting links and stories via the status update.

Questions concerning who is looking and if they had ever really thought about it led to questions about the newly tagged phenomenon of ‘Facebook stalking.’ Since the term is less than five years old and has not been a subject of academic discussion until recently, the participants were each asked to give a definition of what “Facebook stalking” is. It was assumed that participants had prior experience with the terminology because it is commonly accepted jargon that is used to describe the behavior of regular users of the social networking site. The most comprehensive definition of “Facebook stalking” came from the 21-year-old super senior, and the rhetoric used in her simple definition connotes a more serious issue than the other participants’ observations.

According to the super senior:

Facebook stalking is when someone has very strong emotions towards another, lustfully and hatefully. This stalker feels that they must constantly view his victim’s profile for the purposes of knowing what the victim has done, is doing, and is going to do. The stalker also feels that they must know who the victim’s friends are and they will keep track of who the victim sends and receives comments and wall posts from.

Additionally, she notes that “Facebook stalkers are the same as cyberstalkers, except that Facebook stalkers use only Facebook to keep track of their victims. Cyberstalkers use a variety of other networks and websites to follow their victims.” Other participants had much lighter definitions for the term, including:

Facebook stalking...is a joking thing that people say to describe collecting information about someone from Facebook in a more-than passive way. ...if there was someone (for example someone I had a crush on) and I was using Facebook to get every bit of info about that person I could, that would be Facebook stalking. But I think it’s harmless. Cyberstalking is serious. —Female, 27, recent graduate and

Facebook stalking is when you regularly (like at least 1-2 times per day) check a certain person’s Facebook wall and minifeed, try to befriend their friends, and look at all their pictures and activity. It can become like cyberstalking, but isn’t as bad, because with Facebook stalking, you are using one website, not Googling and hacking a person’s info from every corner possible. —Female, 21, senior at a southeastern university

Other definitions referred to genuine curiosity about friends:

I think Facebook stalking is knowingly and purposely checking people’s profiles on a daily basis because you are genuinely intrigued by what they are doing all the time. I think it involves being curious about one person, maybe a few. — Female, 21, senior at a southeastern coastal college and

...I think constantly spending lots of time looking at a person's profile and trying to analyze them through their friend connections, photos, etc. might qualify as Facebook stalking. I think cyberstalking can include Facebook stalking, but cyberstalking might be more sinister. I doubt someone would be Facebook 'friends' with someone who would be likely to cyberstalk them. –Male, 24, recent graduate

One of the participants, the 19-year-old sophomore, pointed out that she didn't think it was like cyberstalking and that "you should take it into account when getting a profile. Some people are a little creepy with the stalking but [it's] not as bad as cyberstalking." Another mentioned that subscribing to alternative methods of being notified about online happenings could signify Facebook stalking. These alternative methods include being subscribed to receive text message alerts when profiles have been updated and statuses have been changed.

With these definitions of "Facebook stalking" in mind, the participants were asked to recall whether they had ever carried their own monitoring too far. Responses seemed to be quite honest as participants noted feelings of jealousy, creepiness, and generally unhealthy habits in their online behaviors. For example, the 18-year-old male freshman admitted to "creep[ing] on [his] teachers to try to find out more about their personal lives" while the 21-year-old senior from a southeastern university laughingly joked that she might have carried her monitoring too far "once or twice... [but] not the creepy point." Still, Facebook has provided its members with a way for them to check up on people without their knowledge. The 18-year-old female freshman recalls a time when she "did check one guy's page that [she] had a crush on everyday for a while. But [she]

realized how unhealthy and silly that was” and she notes that she has “never taken Facebook too seriously.” Moreover, the 27-year-old recent graduate admits to monitoring her boyfriend’s page and feeling “a little creepy because [she] want[s] to know if any girls are posting on his wall.” She notes, however, that she’s not sure “if it’s creepy as much as just unhealthy jealousy.” The social networking site is accepted as a good tool for maintaining relationships virtually despite distance, and its prominence in society is quite evident with its ability to keep us constantly ‘in the know’.

Discussion

Essentially, the primary purpose of the present study was to discover how the notion of power emerges in relationships cultivated online from the daily use of Facebook; how the behavior of Facebook users is described regarding their personal identities on public profiles especially with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism; and how can social-searching might lead to cyberstalking. After the interviews were completed, an inductive analysis was done to identify recurring themes. Four themes emerge as analyst-constructed categories. I have labeled them as:

Category 1: Prominence of Facebook in contemporary society

Category 2: Social Searching as a key motive for using the SNS

Category 3: Maintaining Relationships with friends via the SNS

Category 4: Facebook Stalking as a general and acceptable practice among users

These categories suggest a cyclical process (see Figure 3), which flows from one category to the next and starts over again. It should be noted, however, that this cycle is merely a potential model of Facebook stalking since only self-described motivated users

participated in the current research. The prospective model offers suggestions concerning some of the ways motivated users use Facebook; these suggestions seem to normalize behaviors (e.g., Facebook stalking) that were perhaps originally questionable.

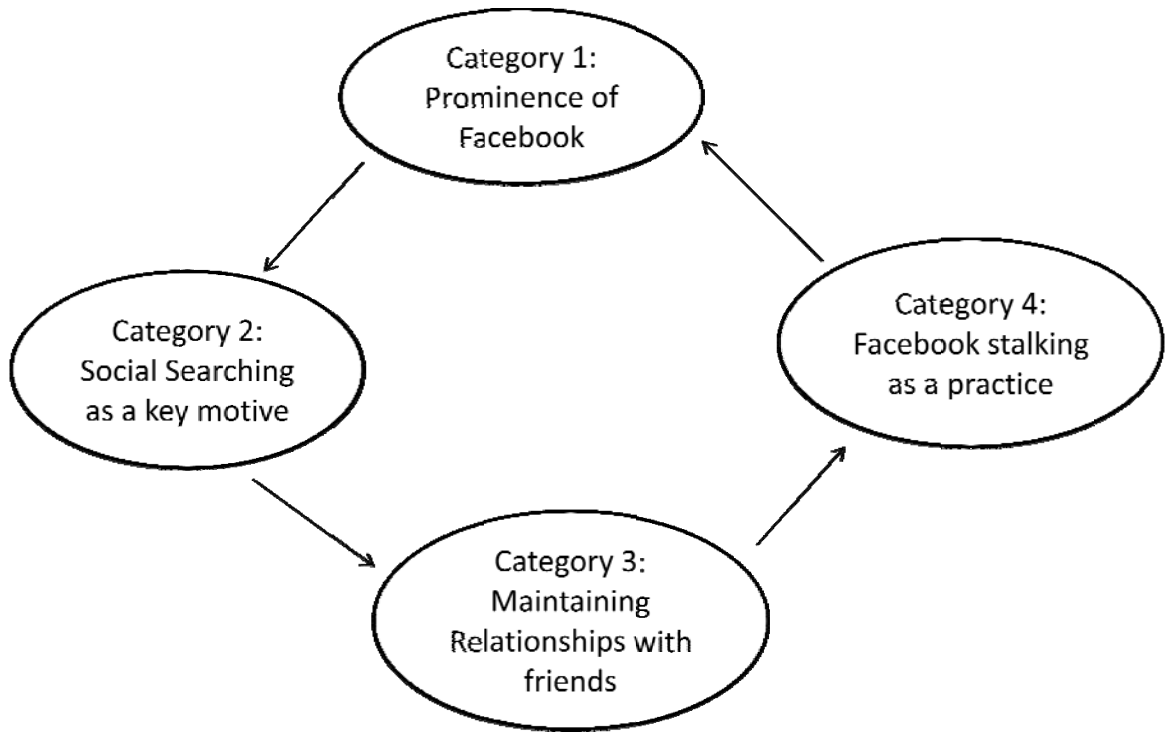


Figure 2. The “Facebook stalking” Cycle.

Essentially, the potential model shows that Facebook had to become a prominent fixture in our online social lives before any of the other categories could take root. Facebook became popular because it allowed its users to perform social searches and maintain relationships with friends and acquaintances, which are represented as Categories 2 and 3. From the first three categories, the idea of “Facebook stalking” emerges. Categories 2, 3, and 4 make Facebook that much more prominent in society, so the cycle continues. The implications each category suggests will be discussed in the following sections.

Category 1: Prominence of Facebook in Contemporary Society

As expected, checking in on Facebook ranks high for motivated users when asked ‘what do you do when you log onto a computer?’ Checking email (which, many participants noted, notifies Facebook users of received friend requests, messages, and wall posts) is the only activity that was consistently listed before checking or logging into Facebook for the motivated users interviewed. In fact, users admit to keeping Facebook open for the entire time they are at a computer, and they confess to wanting to be the first to know new updates. Before Facebook was conceived in 2004, keeping in touch was limited to email, phone calls, and letters. Facebook has transformed our lives to such an extent that we have eliminated the need for verbal communication in real world settings; virtual means have proven to be acceptable among many social networking site users. According to the latest Facebook statistics, the social networking sites boasts over 250 million users, and more than 30 million users update their status at least once a day (Statistics, 2009, np). However, those who consider themselves to be motivated Facebook users generally love the site because it makes communicating with friends, family, coworkers and acquaintances much easier. Everyone who has access to a Facebook page can be updated with just a click of a button.

Category 2: Social Searching as a Key Motive for using the SNS

Other researchers have found that a certain sense of relationship maintenance and social searching takes places within the Facebook community; therefore, the category ‘social searching as a key motive for social networking sites’ seemed fitting. As discussed earlier, Lampe, Ellison and Steinfeld (2006), found that the practice of

discovering more information about contacts from the real world was prevalent in virtual spaces such as social networking websites. Facebook offers unique features that afford users a look into the lives of their friends through a newsfeed and notifications that appear upon logging into the site. Therefore, researchers suggest that “Facebook members [use the site] as a surveillance tool for maintaining previous relationships, and as a ‘social search’ tool by which they investigate people they’ve met offline” (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfeld, 2006, p. 170). Many of the participants in the present study joined the Facebook community because their friends were already members. Staying in communication, keeping in touch, and networking were strong motives in joining the social networking community for all nine participants, regardless of their age or when they joined. Additionally, the most common purpose for using Facebook reflected a desire to stay in touch with friends. Since most of the participants refer to checking up on their friends, finding out more about people they’ve just met, and networking as positive experiences they have with social networking site, it is safe to say that one of the primary motivations for using Facebook is the desire to keep stay in the loop by keeping in touch with friends.

The desire to maintain relationships with other Facebook users is a strong motivation for using the social networking site. This becomes even more apparent as the participants described what they typically do when logging onto Facebook. Reading notifications and checking the newsfeed rank high on all participants’ descriptions of their time spent on Facebook. The newsfeed or mini-feed makes it easier for Facebook users to see recent changes made to their friends’ profiles. Facebook affords friends and family who are separated by great distances, and even those who are not, the opportunity

to keep up with the minor details of their daily lives from simply monitoring techniques such as checking notifications and reading status updates that conveniently pop up on the newsfeed which appears on the home page upon logging in.

Social searching also suggests that the idea of constantly being under surveillance and scrutiny. Facebook users essentially take on a performative function with regard to the panopticon because anyone can be looking at any time. This amplifies and underscores notions of power in online relationships – exchanges of power are constant because of Facebook’s panoptic features.

Category 3: Maintaining Relationships with Friends via Facebook

Closely aligned with category 2, category 3 defines the results of social searches on Facebook as friends of Facebook users. The term friend in Facebook terms refers to anyone whom the user identifies as a contact or acquaintance; friendship is requested through a friend request feature that users can either accept or ignore. Upon accepting friendship requests, other users are granted access to one’s profile. However, privacy settings can be manipulated in a way that only certain information is available to certain people. When asked to describe the kind of people who are on their friends’ list, the respondents’ answers included coworkers; family; friends from elementary, middle, and high school; college friends; friends of friends; close friends; family friends; and church friends. It was noted that most friends are within a few years of the respondent’s age, and most of the participants said that they knew or at least met those who were on their friends’ list. However, others report sometimes not knowing all of the people on their friends list. Keep in mind that “Facebook's popularity continues to grow day by day...

[and] since January 2007, the average number of new registrations per day is 250,000” (Strickland, 2009, np). Additionally, “Facebook says that the number of active users doubles every six months, [and that] members from the United States account for most of Facebook’s population...” (np). According to the latest statistics Facebook has published, the average user has 120 friends, and over 5 billion minutes are spent browsing the site’s pages and using various functions (Statistics, 2009, np). To this end, the participants were also asked to recall approximately how many friends they have on their friends list and whether or not they communicated with all of them. Answers ranged from 34 to 650. However, none of the participants said that they communicate with everyone on their friends list, including those participants who report having less than 100 friends on their contact list. In fact, most participants admitted to only being in regular communication with a small subset of their total friends’ list, usually equaling less than half of the people who have been granted access to their profile.

Essentially, the social networking site is accepted as a good tool for maintaining relationships virtually despite distance. The two freshmen both refer to the social networking site as a good tool that ‘keeps them in the loop’, with the male explaining that if he is away for a period of time “...if [he is] out of town, [he] feels ‘out of the loop’” and the female reporting that she “mainly use[s] it to see what others are up to and stay connected in the loop.” The idea of being ‘kept in the loop’ is promulgated by the ability to access Facebook from mobile devices and to receive notifications via SMS messaging when friends have updated their information. For example, the 21-year-old senior from a southeastern university confesses that she sometimes feels anxious when she isn’t around a computer to check Facebook but having “a cell phone with internet helps [with] that

problem” while the 20-year-old senior explains that she uses her “iPod touch with the Facebook application and [her] phone [to] get updates via text message” to curb any anxiety she may feel from being away from a more traditional means of checking in on the social networking site. The sophomore even admits that she “gets on Facebook way more than [she] would like to admit” and that she “sometimes...wish[es] she [didn’t] have one, but [she] know[s she] would not talk to half as many people if [she] deleted it. It’s kind of too late to stop now.” The 24-year-old male agrees that Facebook has permeated society in such a way that he thinks “it contributes to a technological overload and cheapens the human experience.”

All of these experiences speak to power differentials in specific relationships. Anxiety, the desire to be constantly connected, and thoughts of it being too late to stop using the social networking site – under the pretense that it is too much a part of our social lives – leads one to believe that not only has Facebook permeated society in an irreversible way, but all of the terminology and behaviors associated with the use of the site have become normalized and accepted as common social practice.

Category 4: Facebook Stalking as a General and Acceptable Social Practice

The phenomenon of Facebook stalking is less than five years old and has not fully been explored until recently. In fact, there is little to no academic research concerning the phenomenon. Most people dismiss Facebook stalking as a joke or an activity that is not as serious as full-fledged cyberstalking. When the participants were each asked to give a definition of what they believe Facebook stalking is, two responses merited discussion. The most comprehensive definition came from a 21-year-old super senior, and the

rhetoric used in her definition connotes a more serious issue than the other participants' observed. As noted in the results section, according to the super senior:

Facebook stalking is when someone has very strong emotions towards another, lustfully and hatefully. This stalker feels that they must constantly view [the] victim's profile for the purposes of knowing what the victim has done, is doing, and is going to do. The stalker also feels that they must know who the victim's friends are and they will keep track of who the victim sends and receives comments and wall posts from.

Additionally, she notes that "Facebook stalkers are the same as cyberstalkers, except that Facebook stalkers use only Facebook to keep track of their victims. Cyberstalkers use a variety of other networks and websites to follow their victims." The use of violent rhetoric (stalker, victim, etc.) suggests a much more serious situation than the other more jovial responses rendered. For example, another participant had much lighter definitions for the term (as noted in the results section), employing less aggressive rhetoric that connotes relatively harmless behavior:

Facebook stalking is when you regularly (like at least 1-2 times per day) check a certain person's Facebook wall and minifeed, try to befriend their friends, and look at all their pictures and activity. It can become like cyberstalking, but isn't as bad, because with Facebook stalking, you are using one website, not Googling and hacking a person's info from every corner possible. –Female, 21, senior at a southeastern university

Other definitions referred to genuine curiosity about friends and a less serious offense than the term cyberstalking connotes. One of the participants, the 19-year-old

sophomore, pointed out that “you should take it into account when getting a profile” while another mentioned that subscribing to alternative methods of being notified about online happenings could be a sign of a Facebook stalker. Based on the definitions shared, it is obvious that cyberstalking connotes a much more serious offense than Facebook stalking, but Facebook stalking is perhaps not as much of a joking manner as one might have previously thought.

Stalking, however, is a harsh and loaded term, as is healthy curiosity. Stalking suggests activity that is too insidious for activity on what is meant to be a fun social networking site where a real sense of community is formed between friends and acquaintances each time a status is updated or a picture is uploaded. Stalking, within the context of Facebook, is merely a sense curiosity that friends and acquaintances develop within their online relationships.

The information in these definitions suggests that there is more to “Facebook stalking” than the original interviews revealed. Follow-up interviews were conducted in order to delve deeper into “Facebook stalking” as a specific social phenomenon. All nine of the original participants were contacted with follow-up questions a month after the original interviews took place. Six of the original respondents answered the follow-up questions. Participants were asked more personal questions about “Facebook stalking” and their specific involvement in such activities. From these questions, three microthemes for category four emerged:

Microtheme 1: Facebook stalking as situation dependent

Microtheme 2: Facebook stalking as a healthy curiosity

Microtheme 3: Facebook stalking as an inevitable consequence

Each microtheme describes specific behaviors associated with “Facebook stalking,” and from these behaviors, one can assume that the phenomenon has emerged as an acceptable social practice among Facebook users.

Microtheme 1: Facebook stalking as situation dependent

Upon hearing the responses of many of the respondents, it became clear that the idea of Facebook stalking was not of utmost concern to them. To them, performing surveillance activities via the social networking site was situation dependent and acceptable under certain circumstances. For a male college freshman, Facebook stalking was not habitual but rather became a “necessity” in order to cope with being a new student at a large university. Another participant mentioned checking up on friends to make sure they were okay after a weekend of partying or after they had been sick, and others talked about using it to find out more about people in whom they may have romantic interest. Using the social networking site for surveillance in this way is not threatening to third parties, and users seem to perform social surveillance in various situations that change from person to person. Friends are able to check up on their contacts casually by reading their updates and posts, which further plays into the idea of a panopticon – where the guard is able to perform surveillance on prisoners – or not – from a central location without being detected. This is noteworthy because it relates back to Kolek and Saunders (2008) notion that using Facebook seems to enhance “students’ sense of community, integration, and connections with other students at institutions of higher education” (p. 20). Additionally, as noted previously, many users consider much of the activity on Facebook to be less threatening and less oppressive than the terms

‘stalking’ and ‘cyberstalking’ suggest: It appears as though most users exhibit a healthy curiosity when it comes to social browsing and social searching for their friends and acquaintances.

Microtheme 2: Facebook stalking as a healthy curiosity

Keeping Bentham’s original panoptic structure in mind, social surveillance or “Facebook stalking” also plays into the idea of people having a natural and healthy curiosity about what their friends are doing. When the participants were asked to recall whether they had ever carried their own monitoring too far, responses seemed to be quite honest as participants noted feelings of jealousy, creepiness, and generally unhealthy habits in their online behaviors. Despite these honest answers, when the participants were asked if they would categorize themselves as Facebook stalkers, their answers were generally no, that their social searching and social surveillance was typically the result of certain circumstances that called for needing more information that is easily gleaned from the social networking site. For an 18-year old male freshman, checking up on friends via Facebook stems from “a lack of personal face-to-face interaction,” and he adds that “some social situations can be intimidating.” Through Facebook’s panoptic features, users are able to check up on their friends from a central location without being noticed, which is socially gratifying, especially in situations marked by a lack of personal contact or in situations where there is uncertainty or some kind of intimidation factor, as noted by the male freshman.

Additionally, Facebook users’ desire to know more about their friends seems to be more about having a general curiosity about what their friends are doing rather than an

unhealthy obsession with their friends' activities. For a 21-year old senior, it is curiosity that gets the best of her. She notes "if I see [that my friends] have put a status update (sic), it makes me wonder what they have been up to and [my curiosity] just goes from there." Performing surveillance activities for most users was also noted as the result of boredom and habit. Essentially, Facebook is accepted as a good tool for maintaining relationships virtually despite distance, and its prominence in society is quite evident with its ability to keep us constantly 'in the know.' Again, through its panoptic features and the centrality of observation focal points, Facebook users, identified as guards from Bentham's original panoptic structure, are able to perform social surveillance on their friends, identified as prisoners from the original structure, in order to maintain relationships based on a healthy curiosity in the activities and social lives of those being watched. Culturally speaking, the use of Facebook has had a major impact on our lives as it has become a buzz term and pop culture reference on television shows and even in the news. The idea of looking in on other people's lives from a safe, central location without being seen, which is afforded to users by their membership on Facebook, suggests that curiosity and social surveillance is effectively encouraged by virtue of the make-up of the social networking website.

Microtheme 3: Facebook stalking as an inevitable consequence

Given that Facebook stalking is the result of certain situations that necessitate social surveillance and of Facebook users having a natural and healthy curiosity about their friends, it seems natural that Facebook stalking is an inevitable consequence of the site's setup and design. To this end, participants were asked if everyone, to some degree,

should be considered a Facebook stalker by virtue of how the site is set up. Most agreed saying that the constant updates on the newsfeed coupled with notifications make it very difficult to not be in the know. Logging into the site offers a constant reminder of what friends are doing because Facebook makes information readily accessible via the news feeds and users have become accustomed to checking for these updates, almost like second nature. By virtue of the site's set up, it is perhaps more difficult to not know what is going on in the lives of friends given the site's public nature.

In the same vein, it is especially important to point out that participants noted the search features, 'Googling,' and subscribing to status updates via text message (SMS) notifications as other ways to keep up with their friends. In late April/early May 2009, many Facebook users noticed that "Facebook has widely activated a feature that allows you to ... opt to receive texts with status updates, messages, pokes, and wall posts from selective friends right when they happen" (Rao, 2009, para. 1). Rao notes that while the function isn't necessarily new, "the mobile landing page that packages all of Facebook's Mobile offerings is brand new. Because of this addition, its only now that people are beginning to realize many of these mobile features even exist" (para. 4). In July 2009, Facebook also began testing new versions of their search options that went network wide on August 10, 2009. According to Wable (2009), Facebook users

will be able to search the last thirty days of [their] News Feed for status updates, photos, links, videos, and notes being shared by [their] friends and the Facebook pages of which [they are] a fan. If people have chosen to make their content available to everyone, [users] also will be able to search for their status updates, links and notes, regardless of whether or not [they] are friends. Search results will

continue to include people's profiles as well as relevant Facebook Pages, groups and applications. (para. 2)

What this explanation does not point out is that upon running your own search of someone in the search box at the top right hand corner of the Facebook homepage, not only will the "relevant Facebook Pages, groups and applications" (para. 2) emerge, but so will recent posts they have made on yours or other people's profiles in addition to the top ten web results from bing.com [See Appendix E]. This feature was not widely available when the interviews were completed; in fact, Facebook makes changes so often that it is difficult to stay on top of all of the implementations they make. Suffice it to say, however, Facebook is making it even easier to become a 'cyberstalker' by adding in the top ten web results option, and some users are already unnerved by the ease with which searching can get out of hand. The post concerning the new search options, however, notes that

By being able to search more types of content that are being shared on the site, you can easily find out your friends' evening plans and recently frequented restaurants by searching for 'dinner,' discover which of your friends are following Michael Schumacher's comeback during the 'Formula 1' season by searching for the race series, or query 'economy' to see if people or your favorite new sources feel that the recession is turning around. You also can search for a company or product to learn what people are saying about that brand. (para. 4)

Keeping in mind the definition of Facebook stalking that suggests that it is less harmful "because with Facebook stalking, you are using one website, not Googling and hacking a person's info from every corner possible," it seems as though the developers of the site

are making it easier to become fully fledged cyberstalkers by linking so much information to one hub, therefore allowing users to find everything they need with a click of the button.

Research Questions Revisited

This research was guided by three central interest areas. First, I explored how Facebook users might utilize the site as an opportunity to practice various degrees of social surveillance. Then, I examined how the behavior of Facebook users is described with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism, especially regarding personal identities on public profiles. Finally, I explored how social searching can lead to an overall idea of cyberstalking. Practically speaking, I also examined whether Facebook users consider themselves cyberstalkers or something less offensive and insidious, and the responses I gathered ultimately expanded upon notions of power alluded to by Michel Foucault through an exploration Facebook's panoptic features that reflect Bentham's early work within prison systems.

The opinions gathered from the interviews reveals interesting data that supports the research questions concerning power, panopticism, and cyberstalking posed at the beginning of the study. With respect to the first research question, that is how do Facebook users utilize the site as an opportunity to practice various degrees of social surveillance, the following observations were made. The most common reason for using Facebook reflected a desire to stay in touch with friends. Many participants refer to checking up on their friends, finding out more about people they've just met, and networking as positive experiences they have with social networking site. Additionally,

the desire to maintain relationships with other Facebook users is a strong motivation for using the social networking site. This becomes even more apparent as the participants described what they typically do when logging onto Facebook. Reading notifications and checking the newsfeed rank high on all participants' descriptions of their time spent on Facebook. The newsfeed or mini-feed makes it easier for Facebook users to see recent changes made to their friends' profiles. Facebook affords friends and family who are separated by great distances, and even those who are not, the opportunity to keep up with the minor details of their daily lives from simply monitoring techniques such as checking notifications and reading status updates that conveniently pop up on the newsfeed which appears on the home page upon logging in.

The second research question had to deal with panopticism and user behavior. Specifically, it asked with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism, how is the behavior of Facebook users described, especially regarding personal identities on public profiles? The interview question that directly related to this was 'do you feel like you have to constantly update pictures, profile information, or status updates to keep your friends informed?' Responses to this question were more down the middle of the road: It depends on the person as to whether or not they feel it to be necessary to keep friends updated via status changes and posting pictures. Some participants noted doing this 'pretty often' because they 'like for people to know what's going on' in their lives. Others report not really feeling an obligation to their friends, but more so that they want their profiles to accurately reflect their lives. One participant's response was quite adamant, that she did not have to nor did she constantly update her profile because

if [friends] are close enough to [her] they will know. Status updates actually annoy [her] most of the time [because] no one needs to know everything you've done in the past hour (Ex. Working out, home work, going to the bathroom, then calling my grandma) NO, [she] hate[s] that! –Female, 19, college sophomore

Furthermore, the idea that Facebook keeps us constantly connected suggests that our online identities are true representations of ourselves because this is the way that we keep our friends and family members informed. As a social medium, Facebook truly does offer its users constant connectivity. Users can update their profiles, post links, send messages, and write on walls at any given time of day from any computer with an Internet connection. Moreover, internet-enabled mobile devices such as the iPhone, the iPod touch, the Blackberry, and other cell phones with internet capabilities make it possible to access Facebook even when you are away from a computer. To this end, convenience levels and the ease with which one can contact friends and acquaintances was a popular answer to the question concerning connectivity. Additionally, duration of time spent on Facebook is quite noteworthy. Participants mostly admit to checking updates to the social networking site once or twice a day for a few minutes; however, some confess that whenever they are at a computer, one of the opened tabs is usually connected to Facebook so that they can be the first to know of changes and so that they are readily accessible to other online friends. This also further supports the notion that the website itself holds a sense of power over its users.

The final research question, which pertains to how social-searching can lead to cyberstalking, is answered by the Facebook stalking cycle which encompasses the four analyst-constructed categories. The categories are dependent upon each other: first,

Facebook had to become a social phenomenon that is widely accepted by users across the globe and across generational lines. This part of the equation was met as Facebook continues to see exponential growth. In just five short years, more than 250 million users have logged on to the social networking site and more than 120 million of those users log in at least once a day and use various applications in order to keep in touch with their friends and to maintain relationships with their contacts. The next part of the cycle is category two, social searching as a key motive for using the social networking site. As discussed previously, with respect to the Internet and social networking purposes, students report using the Internet “for fun” (Kolek & Saunders, 2008, p. 3), and “as a means of communicating for social purposes” (p. 3-4). Being able to connect with like-minded people online is a selling point for many social networking sites. Additionally, Facebook becomes a platform for people to come together for open pathways of communication among friends and acquaintances. Therefore, Facebook becomes a monitoring tool that supports friendships and helps to maintain new relationships established during social searching. This leads into category three which is maintaining relationships with friends via social networking sites. Lampe and his colleagues suggest that “often, the development of online interactions focuses on finding people online with whom you have a shared connection, but would not be likely to meet in an offline context” (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006, p. 167); however, they also note that “there are examples of participants who do meet people online for emotional support or understanding that they may not be able to receive in their offline interactions” (p. 167). Data from the interviews also offers strong support for the idea of relationship maintenance. All of these categories come together to suggest that Facebook stalking

becomes a general and acceptable social practice among its users, which is category four. As is apparent from the interviews discussed, Facebook stalking is a relatively harmless form of getting to know more about contacts on the social networking site. However, many of the participants noted that if left unchecked or unmonitored, some behaviors could be construed as borderline cyberstalking, which connotes a much more serious offense of personal privacy.

So, does the notion of power emerge in relationships cultivated online from the daily use of Facebook? Essentially, yes. There is a constant flux of power on social networking sites. The site itself reveals itself as a manifestation of power. In the interviews, one participant referred to having a Facebook account as a “requirement.” Many participants seem to have a mindset of ‘everyone else has a profile’ and one even notes that she believes it’s “too late” to get out of having a profile now. Being accessible via Facebook has become such a large part of our online social lives that to be without a Facebook profile is to be left out completely. Furthermore, power can be connoted by anxiety. At the outset of the study, power was assumed to be in the hands of the one who holds the gaze, who has the access. However, after the interviews were completed, that assumption remains true but with a slight twist. Power shifts from one user to another with communication. For example, the 24-year-old recent graduate shared the following:

I get a little anxious if I haven’t been on the computer for a while in general. But I only get legitimately anxious if I have written to or contacted someone and they have not replied within several days. I find that sort of thing really annoying.

When a message or wall post is not returned, the sender’s anxiety is heightened. Typically this heightened anxiety results into even higher levels of looking (checking to

see if the receiver of the communication has updated anything on their profile or if they have had communication with other Facebook users). But still, the power remains in the receiver's hands. Only when a response is received does power become equal again. The idea of social searching also suggests constant surveillance activity. Facebook users essentially take on a performative function with regard to the panopticon because anyone can be looking at any time. This amplifies and underscores notions of power in online relationships – exchanges of power are constant because of Facebook's panoptic features.

CHAPTER 4: LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations

Limitations to completing this research have been time and resources. Ideally, a study comprising mixed methods would be completed in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of Facebook's panoptic features. To manage a study of such magnitude would require time and resources that were not at the researcher's disposal. In the future, a more detailed and thorough examination of the social networking site's panoptic features should be completed in order to make larger claims on a societal level.

Furthermore, using qualitative questionnaires as the method for data collection also proved to be somewhat limiting. The labor intensity that comes along with responding to open-ended questions typically makes respondents reluctant to go into detail because of the amount time and effort required to do so. Accordingly, the responses from the participants in the present study ultimately reflected three mindsets, one specifically relating to the 'stalker' and the other two relating to the 'victim.' The first mindset, relating to the stalker, revolves around intentionality, another of Bentham's (1781) concepts relating to consciousness and decision-making. Bentham suggests that one may intend to do something; but by acting, there results an unintentional consequence. Bentham explains that intentionality becomes moot when the result, or consequence, is substantial. The result becomes the proof: Regardless of intentionality, the act itself and its inevitable consequences categorize the aforementioned act as inappropriate. In the case of Facebook stalking, one may not have meant to invade another's privacy, but in delving into all of the avenues Facebook offers users – through

status updates, pictures, applications, links, and wall messages – an invasion of privacy has still taken place, according to Bentham. The unintended consequences therefore outweigh prior intentionality: Those who Facebook stalk do not intentionally seek to cause harm; however, they can never know the result of their aimless clicking. Despite this mindset, the respondents for the present study see no harm in their “aimless” clicking.

The second and third mindsets adopted by the respondents in the present study relate to the ‘victim’ in the stalker/stalkee equation. The second mindset was explicitly stated in the interviews of a few participants. The idea that ‘victims’ “asked for it” (that is, to be Facebook stalked) by making their information public on the social networking site did emerge as a reason for why Facebook stalking is seen as less offensive than cyberstalking as a whole. Blame (Felson & Felson, 1993) is a subject of morality on “which reasonable people can disagree...By its nature it is not given to scientific measurement” (p. 17), and therefore cannot truly be apportioned. However, the idea that the ‘victim’ brings the act upon him/herself, a common myth in sexual abuse cases, can be appropriately applied to Facebook stalking as well.

The third mindset relies upon an implicit attitude among the participants. Generally speaking, because of a normative social influence, most people have a tendency to conform to popular opinion. Asch (1955) was the first to examine compliance and conformity through a series of experiments studying the effects of social influence on his participants when a majority of people gave a dissenting answer from truth. Asch reports that “a considerable percentage yielded to the majority” (p. 3), meaning that public opinion sways attitude. Furthermore, Cinnierella and Green (2007)

discuss the idea of “cyber-conformity” and suggest that compliance in computer-mediated and face-to-face groups alike rely heavily upon group-decision making processes (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984) and group polarization (Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990). Coupled with the “they asked for it” mentality, I suggest that the respondents in the present study report feeling as if the act of Facebook stalking is not detrimental because they think that it is the consensus of a larger group thought. This would explain why reports of the act being dangerous and threatening were low, despite the fact that Facebook stalking has crept into discussions of stalking situations in specific sexual harassment cases.

Future Research

It is especially important to point out that participants noted the search features, ‘Googling,’ and subscribing to status updates via text message (SMS) notifications as ways to further monitor their friends’ use of Facebook. In late April/early May 2009, many Facebook users took notice of a more enhanced SMS features that allowed them to subscribe to a service that would send texts notifying them of status updates and received messages, pokes, and wall posts. Then in July 2009, Facebook began testing new versions of their search options that went network wide on August 10, 2009. The search options allow users to run their own search of someone on the Facebook search engine which retrieves Facebook pages, groups, and applications relevant to the search content and also recent posts the search subject has made on yours or other people’s profiles in addition to the top ten web results from bing.com. Since this feature was not widely available when the interviews were completed, and since Facebook makes changes so

often that it is difficult to stay on top of all of the new implementations, more research should be done to gauge the effect the new search features are having on user satisfaction and the ease with which one can become a ‘cyberstalker.’

Furthermore, a study involving the tenets of virtual community building, especially emphasizing the different social roles Facebook users adopt, would be beneficial in discovering the meaning behind the behaviors exhibited online. It is important to keep in mind that the roles on social networking sites like Facebook are not necessarily static nor are they necessarily regulated by a moderator. These two characteristics suggest that more can happen with regard to stalking within the confines of the community that is never policed by an official, it is only monitored by other members of the community. This has major implications for society at large, especially with respect to cyberbullying and whether these relationships transfer from the virtual world to real world situations. Additionally, using the prospective model as a suggestion for how Facebook stalking comes about, future research may be able to make more general claims about the social practice.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to deepen the existing knowledge concerning social networking sites, with a specific interest in the social networking site Facebook and the phenomenon, “Facebook stalking”. This research provides insights into lesser-known studies concerning user curiosity and surveillance online. The terms ‘monitoring’ and ‘keeping up with’ or ‘keeping in touch with’ were most commonly used when referring to social searches within social networks; only when asked to think about

surveillance in terms of stalking did the interview respondents refer to it as such. A socially constructed term, stalking in regard to Facebook specifically is non-threatening. In fact, a reference to stalking within the Facebook community is simply a reference to seemingly constant surveillance or heightened curiosity amongst friends and acquaintances within the social network. This study is groundbreaking because little to no work has been completed concerning interactions within social networks, and comparing a popular online network such as Facebook to a prison through the lens of Bentham's panopticon makes large claims about contemporary society.

The present study aims to discover Facebook users' perception of their friends' disclosure pertaining to how much is too much while delving into the idea of "Facebook stalking", specifically with regard to how users define it. As discussed previously, Facebook's evolution and prominence in the public sphere is dependent upon user satisfaction with and general understanding of the functionality of social networking websites. Discussing these issues is beneficial to understanding how Facebook is used as a modern-day panopticon.

Furthermore, this research reveals how Foucauldian notions of power emerge in relationships cultivated online from the daily use of the social networking site Facebook; how the behavior of Facebook users is shaped by what is posted on public profiles, especially with respect to cyberstalking and panopticism; and how social-searching can lead to cyberstalking. Four categories emerged as analyst-constructed typologies after completing an inductive analysis of the online interviews. These categories are:

Category 1: Prominence of Facebook in contemporary society

Category 2: Social Searching as a key motive for using the SNS

Category 3: Maintaining Relationships with friends via the SNS

Category 4: Facebook Stalking as a general and acceptable practice among users

Category 1 suggests Facebook's prominence in the public sphere and notes that before Facebook was conceived in 2004, keeping in touch was limited to email, phone calls, and letters. Now, Facebook has transformed our lives so much that we seem to have eliminated the need for verbal communication in real world settings; virtual means have proven to be acceptable among many social networking site users. Category 2 agrees with other research in the field, that social searching is a key motive for using social networking sites, and Category 3 suggests that relationship maintenance is another viable reason for extensive use of Facebook in particular. The fourth category suggests the emergence of what I have referred to as the "Facebook stalking" cycle, which requires the first three categories to take place in order for stalking to become a socially accepted practice among social network site users. The cycle, depicted in the previous section, explains how extensive use of the social networking site lends to users having a genuine healthy curiosity about their friends, rather than a stalker mentality.

The fourth category also introduced three microthemes that emerged concerning Facebook stalking. These were that Facebook stalking is considered to be dependent upon certain situations; that Facebook stalking is more about a healthy curiosity about friends and online acquaintances rather than an unhealthy obsession with them as seen in cyberstalking cases; and that Facebook stalking is a consequence of the site's design.

While it is an interesting facet of the site, the act of Facebook stalking is a harmless way for friends to keep in touch via the social networking site without obtrusively asking for updates. It is a trend that deserves academic attention because of the sheer amount of time Facebook users devote to maintenance of their profiles and sites; but overall, Facebook stalking seems to be a term loosely used to describe the action of performing surveillance type activities on friends that have, at one point or another, existed within the social circles of the those performing the surveillance. The basic structure of Bentham's panopticon can be applied to understand Facebook stalking as simply another way to perform surveillance on friends and acquaintances on the social networking site. The looker – in this case the Facebook stalker – acts as the guard in the model propose by Bentham. The guard views his/her prisoners – in this case the one being stalked – through a central location, the functions and applications of Facebook profiles offered to all users within the community, without being seen by the one being watched.

Essentially, Facebook stalking is a more innocuous form of online data consumption. Stalkers tend to be family members, friends, or acquaintances and are very rarely complete strangers which is why this particular kind of surveillance is typically seen as harmless and less dangerous than its more overt and offensive cousin, cyberstalking. While Facebook stalking and cyberstalking are indeed related, in actuality, the former is much less obtrusive and innocuous because the information gathered is supplied by the 'victim' for the stalker's consumption.

Facebook is a modern day panopticon. It is important to realize that, with regard to Bentham's original structure, at some point or another, everyone takes on the role of

the guard or prisoner. However, what is fascinating about Facebook's panoptic features is that these roles can be taken on simultaneously. Facebook stalking, therefore, is determined to be fueled by a healthy curiosity that feeds one's desire to know about their friends and therefore perform surveillance activities. By virtue of the site's design, we are all encouraged to be 'stalkers' in some way, and the act of looking is celebrated and even embraced as just another method of keeping tabs on those we consider to be our friends, both actual and virtual.

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APPENDIX A: PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(completed Winter 2009 with IRB approval)

1. How would you describe your use of the social networking site, Facebook?
(Light, moderate, heavy?)
2. What is your primary use of the social networking site? (Keeping in touch with friends, email, social organization, etc.).
3. How long have you been a member / When did you join?
 - Why did you join?
4. Do you think that there should be any limitations on who can join/what can be posted/etc?
5. How familiar do you feel with the site?
 - Do you know about privacy settings? Do you use any?
 - Do you think other people use them?
6. What kind of information do you feel is appropriate to disclose on Facebook?
7. Do you feel better about disclosing some things on Facebook rather than in person?
 - If so, what kinds of things?
 - Do you think other people feel the same way?
 - Why?
8. How much do you disclose on Facebook personally?
 - Does this differ from what you feel is appropriate for disclosure? If so, in what ways?
9. Are you familiar with the term Facebook stalking?
 - What is your definition of Facebook stalking?
 - Do you think this is a bad or good thing?
10. Do you consider yourself a Facebook stalker?
 - Why or why not?
11. Do you think the evolution of Facebook has had any impact on our society?
 - If so, explain what kind?
12. Can you think of any ways that Facebook has permeated the public sphere (through politics, media, etc.) and what do you think this means for society?

APPENDIX B: EXPLORATORY FOCUS GROUP QUESTION ROUTE

(completed Spring 2009 with IRB approval)

1. Let's start with introducing ourselves and telling everyone how long you have been on Facebook.
2. Think back to when you first started using Facebook. Can you remember how you heard about it?
3. Why did you join the Facebook community?
4. What words describe your feelings when using Facebook? Using single, easy-to-understand terms, what do you use Facebook for?
5. What features of Facebook are most important to you?
6. What is your primary use of the social networking site, Facebook?
7. How accurately does your profile portray you?
8. Since you created your profile, who do you think has looked at it?
9. Overall, how would you rate your experience with using Facebook?
10. This discussion was completed in order to help me to evaluate your use of Facebook. Is there anything that I didn't cover that you would like to share? Is there anything that you would like to say that you didn't get to say?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM FOR ONLINE INTERVIEWS

Facebook and Panopticism Study: Kennedy

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected.

Explanation of Study

The primary purpose of this research is to understand the general use of and disclosure practices on the social networking site, Facebook. Additionally, it aims to discover Facebook users' perception of their friends' disclosure pertaining to how much is too much while delving into the idea of "Facebook stalking", specifically with regard to how users define it.

Risks and Discomforts

No risks or discomforts are anticipated

Benefits

Disclosure and the idea of "Facebook stalking" have become the norm for many Facebook users, which merits academic study as to what types of disclosure are taking place, how much is too much, and what people expect to discover about their 'friends' each time they log in to the social networking site.

Confidentiality and Records

The text of the interview will be digitally stored along with the transcripts on a password-protected computer. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact *Mary Catherine Kennedy* (mk291908@ohio.edu or mobile 843-344-2582).

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By volunteering to participate, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

APPENDIX D: ONLINE INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

(completed Summer 2009 with IRB Approval)

Instructions: Your answers to these questions are very important. Feel free to be as detailed as possible. The easiest way to complete this online interview is to copy and paste the questions into your response and answer them there.

Remember that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary; you are free to refuse to answer any question at any time; you are free to withdraw at any time; and the information shared will be kept strictly confidential. Thanks again for participating. If you have any further questions, you may contact me at mk291908@ohio.edu.

- Personal Information -

Birth Date (mm/dd/yyyy):

Age:

- Education -

University:

City, State:

Status (fr/soph/jr/sr/other):

Major:

Graduation Date:

Occupation (if applicable):

- Computer Use in General -

How comfortable are you using a computer?

Describe what you do when you log into a computer.

What sites do you visit most frequently? Describe your use.

On average, how long are you online each day? What do you do?

If you haven't been 'online' for a specific period of time, do you become anxious or wonder if someone has contacted you?

- Facebook specific -

Why did you join the Facebook community?

Why do you use Facebook?

How comfortable do you feel using Facebook? Is it almost second-nature?

Describe what you typically do when you log into Facebook.

About how many 'friends' do you have on Facebook? Do you communicate with all of them?

Describe the kind of people who are on your friends list.

In your opinion, who do you think is looking at your profile? Have you ever really thought about it?

What is the duration of your time spent on Facebook? Do you always log out?

Which functions on Facebook (chat, messages, groups, etc) do you use most often? Are there any that you do not use? Why?

Do you check Facebook in other ways besides a conventional desktop/laptop computer? Explain.

How do you feel about Facebook in general?

How extensive is your use of the social networking site?

How often do you browse your friends' profiles? Have you ever found yourself just clicking at links and following what's been posted?

How would you define Facebook stalking? Do you think it's like cyberstalking?

Do you feel like you have to constantly update pictures, profile information, or status updates to keep friends informed?

Do you think you've ever carried your monitoring too far? Has it ever gotten 'creepy'?

Do you use any other social networking sites?

If so, why do you use them? Do they offer something Facebook does not?

To you, what is the purpose of constantly being connected?

Is there anything that you think I've missed that you'd like to share?

APPENDIX E: FACEBOOK SCREENSHOTS

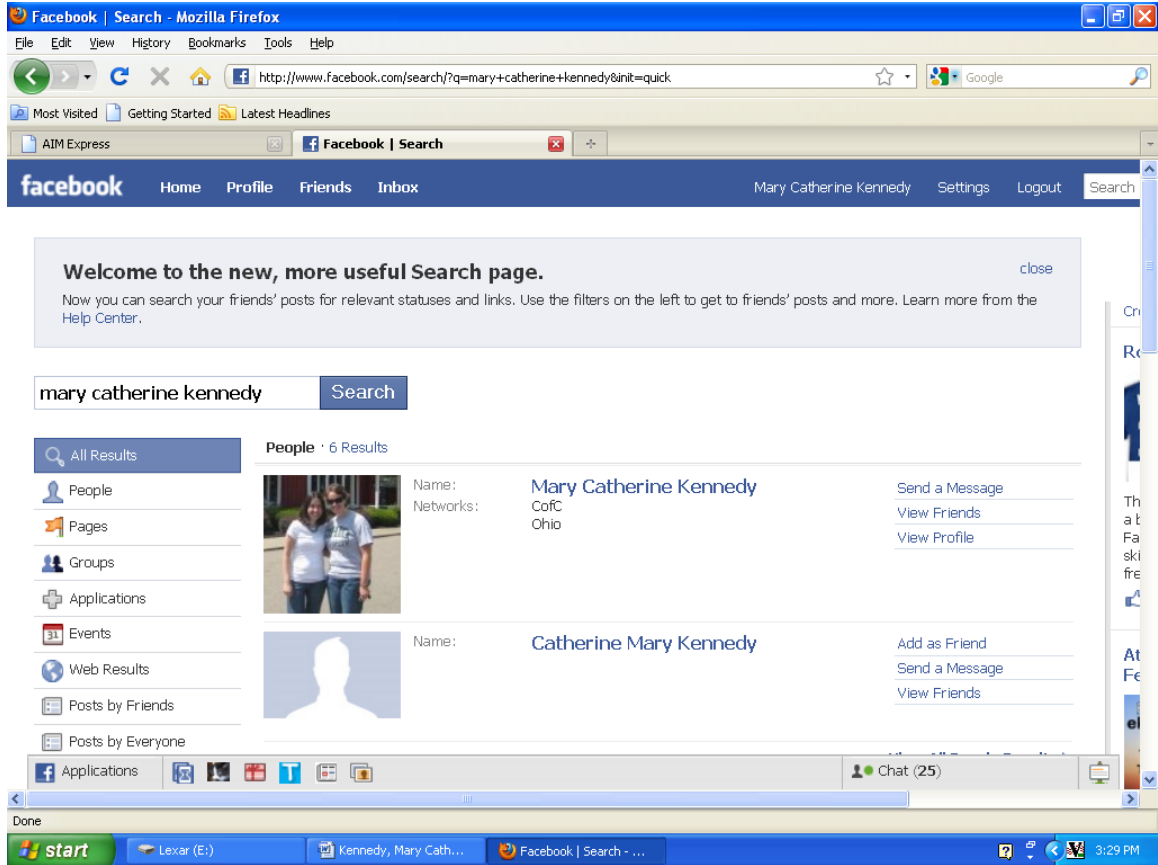


Figure 3. Facebook screenshot of the search function showing ‘People’ results for ‘Mary Catherine Kennedy’. Captured September 7, 2009.

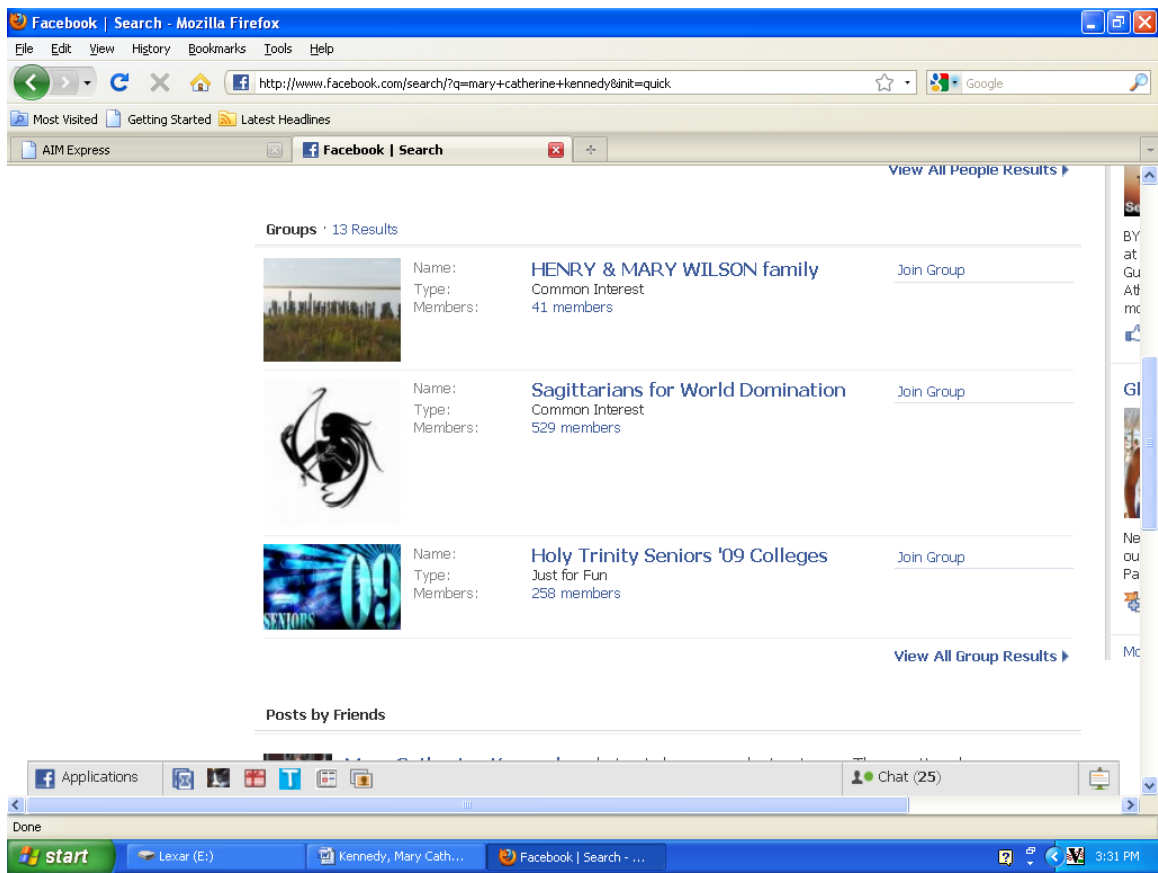


Figure 4. Facebook screenshot of the search function showing ‘Group’ results for ‘Mary Catherine Kennedy.’ Captured September 7, 2009.



Figure 5. Facebook screenshot of the search function showing ‘Posts by Friends’ results for ‘Mary Catherine Kennedy.’ Captured September 7, 2009.



Figure 6. Facebook screenshot of the search function showing ‘Web’ results for ‘Mary Catherine Kennedy.’ Captured September 7, 2009